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"BEFORE THE MURDERER'S SHAKING HAND COULD STEADY ME,
I LEAPED OFF THE ROAD."

Frontispiece (p. 125.) -

CHAMPION

BY
JOHN COLIN DANE
AUTHOR OF
"The Hidden House," etc.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
W. E. WEBSTER

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CHAMPION

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CHAMPION

CHAPTER I.

I Am Born, and Start in Life.

"Champion thou shalt be; and Champion I name thee," solemnly pronounced the nicest voice in my world.

I had heard only one or two others; but if a motor-car is going to be worth its petrol and oil, there are a great many things which it must be born knowing, or it will never know them at all. Among the things I already knew—although I wasn't exactly born yet—was, that there could be no nicer voice in any world than that of my creator and Master. I knew also that, whatever should happen to me in the future, he would be the only man to really matter in my existence. Others might come and go, but if I were his Champion, he was my Hero.

I didn't carburate these thoughts at that moment precisely as I am carburating them now; for, as I say, I had not happened to be born, though I could feel it coming on, and that the great event might occur at any instant.

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“You’re going to make the biggest sensation yet in the automobile world, my beauty,” said the dear voice. It had talked a great deal to me, and often to itself, in my acquaintance with it, so I had come to understand every mood of my Master’s, from its sound.

“This is your great day, and my great day—the day of our lives—so far,” the voice went on. “But there’s going to be a bigger one by and by; that’s what we’re working up to; that’s what you’re born for.”

“Am I born, then?” I wondered. “Is this all—or is there more to come?”

I hoped there was more, for I had been looking forward for so long, that if this were all, I was disappointed in the sensation.

I had been looking forward, semi-consciously, from the dim days when my cylinders were being bored, and pistons fitted. Then the first glimmering of self-knowledge began to filter through the me-ness, which was not yet me; but I could not have exploded into words in that embryo time.

It was only to-day—this glorious to-day—that all my parts had been “assembled.” Loving hands fitted my valves together, adjusting the cams with nicety, as if I were a débutante being dressed for her presentation. (That is the sort of thing I have learned since then; making comparisons, and so on; but there are

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plenty of other things that jump into a motor's bonnet with the first turn of the crank, which sets his or her heart beating and the joy of life quivering through every molecule.)

I was securely fastened to the floor with bolts, as I had been ever since I was put together; and this was why I felt disappointed when my Master said it was my Great Day. Nothing had actually happened; nothing was definitely different. Was this all?

No, it was not all. Into a tank suspended above me there fell the gurgle of liquid, which I began to taste and smell as it mingled with my being. It was exquisite in flavor—^{finer} I am sure than grape-juice could be, or the purest spring water. Hardly had I assimilated this beverage when into my crank-chamber gushed a wave of beautifully refined oil, silky and ease-giving, like balm.

This, indeed, was being born! But there was more, much more to follow.

I was highly excited at these preparations; and when my Master, paying me an occasional compliment as he worked, fitted to the sparking-plugs in my cylinders wires that came from an electric coil, I could hardly control my impatience. I longed to be—something, somewhere—I knew not what, or where. But the longing was very strong.

Suddenly a radiant vision blazed into my waiting

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engine. In a flash I realized that there was a glorious world outside this workroom where I had been created; that there were splendid things in it, mountains and valleys laced with white roads, strange continents to be conquered; and that I had been made to conquer them.

It was at this instant that the greatest wonder happened.

My Master had put a handle to my crank-axle; and now he gave that quick, abrupt turn I mentioned. What rapture! Instinctively I knew what was required of me, though I made no conscious effort. I was I. My carbureter drew in a breath of that intoxicating liquor, which is, for a motor, the elixir of life, sprayed it into a finer powder, and mixed it with exactly the proper proportion of air. My twelve valves, working with no less certainty and precision than the heavenly bodies themselves, sucked the ecstatic draft into the cylinders. At this—marvel upon marvel—a spark of electricity glowed into a little flash that leaped across from one point to another in a flame. The flame united, in a spasm of joy, with the vapor in my first cylinder. Then, in a burst of rapture, they expanded, exploded!

I laughed in my wild happiness, and had not my silencer prevented I should have shouted aloud.

“We’ll show the world—you and I together, my

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Champion," said the dear voice, and my heart rejoiced at the words. I resolved, with something like a tear rising in my carbureter, that I would always do my best for the Master who had done everything for me; that I would be a true and faithful automobile; that I would never back fire; that I would have no tempers and no whims, anyhow, when *he* was driving me; that day and night I would do all in my combustion-chambers to serve my Hero.

How stupid now seemed the old, glimmering half-existence which was all I had known of life! I could hear distinctly through my completed valves; and, better still, I could see—see clearly for the first time, with my sparking-plugs, of course. Later on my lamps would help, just as spectacles help near-sighted eyes; but an automobile does not actually need lamps to see what is going on in front of his bonnet, even at night.

I should have been a monstrous piece of mechanism if I hadn't delighted in my first flashing glimpse of my Master, whom, until this illuminated minute, I had known only through his voice and skilled touches. But honestly, I had not expected to be as delighted as I was.

Young myself, and modern with the modernness of day after to-morrow, naturally I admired youth; and it would have been a blow on the ignition if I had seen him old or plain. But, with the first faint spark that

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kindled the joy of life in me, I saw him youthful, handsome, and strong.

He wore workmen's overalls, and his sleeves were rolled up over arms where the muscles rippled under the smooth skin, like steel under satin, or, as I know now, like tiny waves astir beneath the still, satin surface of southern seas. He was tall, with broad shoulders and a noble throat which rose above the collar of blue cotton, brown where the sleek dark head was set upon it, white below. His face was brown, too, which suited his features, and it was a good thing that he wore no mustache or beard, for his mouth and chin, firm and kind, were worth showing. There might be times when they would look dogged, perhaps; but there was something about the cut of the lips which made me think that he would never fail to see the funny side of life. With his dark hair and brown skin—eyebrows and eyelashes of the blackest—I suppose he ought to have had brown eyes; but, instead, they were the bluest things I could imagine—blue as the wild flowers in fields through which often, since then, I have run.

Those eyes were looking at me with pride and admiration, and I worshiped him. I would rather have crawled at his feet on my lowest speed to make him understand, once and for all, what I felt for him, than I would win a race; unless the race were for his honor and glorification.

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I was dying to prove what I could and would do for his sake, and I hoped that he was going to give me an opportunity, beginning from that very moment. But, whether or not he had any idea of letting me show my paces, a thing happened just then which would in any case have prevented him from putting it into practise.

There came a quick tapping at the closed door of the workshop.

My Master gave a start of surprise and frowned with impatience because, for one thing, he probably didn't want to be interrupted; and for another, it was a new knock, different from the only other knock which had ever sounded on that door within my recollection.

The usual knocking came in two clear, strong raps, and was given by the one man who had helped my Master in creating me. When he went out and left my Hero alone he always knocked when he came back; but when my Master returned after an absence, he walked straight in, by which fact I might have deduced—even if there had not been a hundred other ways for the most embryo piece of mechanism to discover the truth—that my Master was master of the man, as well as of me.

He hesitated for a few seconds; then, going to the door, opened it half-way and looked out.

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"Why, Sheila!" I heard him exclaim. "Dear little girl, how did you find me?"

"You'd never guess, so I may as well tell you at once," answered a pretty voice which, though light and girlish, had tones in it like his.

With that he brought her into the workshop, and he did not shut the door behind him. It was the first time it had ever been left even half-open, and I caught a glimpse of a big room outside, with several creatures, evidently of the automobile family, standing about. My Master had—as he thought—put me to sleep before going to the door; but once alive, always alive, until broken up for old iron, with a thoroughbred motor like myself. I was so interested in these poor relations of mine that I hadn't a glance to spare for my Master's new companion.

Two of the unfortunate machines were dismembered and actually rusty, poor wretches. A third was alive, and making the most horrid grunting noise, which told me that its lubrication was as bad as its manners; a common thing it was, with only two cylinders, while each of the broken-up creatures had only one, if you will believe it. One had also a fractured axle, and betrayed no shame in revealing an abominable flaw in the metal. I thanked my sparks that I had been kept apart from such society. Not one among the lot was a machine I cared to know.

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"Oh, Hugh, how sweet it does seem to see you again," the newcomer was saying excitedly.

I had never seen a girl before; but looking at her made me hope that I might see a great many more, if they were all half as pretty as she.

Her hair was black, like my Master's, and her eyes of the same bright, turquoise blue, under black lashes; but instead of being tall and muscular she was a little thing, with a waist for which I think my Master could have made a belt with his hands. Her face was not brown, but white, with a color on the cheeks as if some one had struck her there with a rose, a blow for each cheek, and the pink color had stained the skin. She had red, red lips, and they were smiling as she stood on tiptoe with her gloved hands on my Master's shoulders.

"And for me to see you, Kittens," he answered her. "But you haven't explained yet the mystery of how you came to find me in this den."

"It isn't a mystery. I saw you. I've been in town for a week, staying with Edith Barr-Simons, and——"

I was lying with my valves open now, drinking in every word they said; and as I had no bonnet on, I could watch each change of their expression. My Master flushed up, and his dark eyebrows drew together as he broke in, echoing: "Barr-Simons!"

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"Of course you must hear of him often, as he's in the motor-car world. He's nobody in point of birth, and awfully *nouveau riche*; but it isn't like you to care for that, and yet——"

My Master laughed—a nice, amused laugh, though uncomfortable, too. "Heaven forbid I should care for that. But Barr-Simons is my—well, never mind. How could you know? And it's better that you shouldn't know."

"If you mean something horrid, perhaps it is better, while I'm in his house, eating and drinking his things—such frightfully good things, too! I suppose it isn't that—that you're angry about Edith marrying him, for you wouldn't look at her in spite of papa wanting it so much. And, anyway, poor girl, she took him quite for his money."

My Master laughed again. "No doubt that's in her favor. But her marriage is nothing to me. I could never stand the girl, though you liked her."

"Well, do let's talk about you. Hugh, darling old boy, never a day, never an hour, I believe, that I haven't thought of you. You can't imagine how I felt, when I saw you walk into this place yesterday. I could have jumped out of the electric brougham."

"Mrs. Barr-Simons' electric brougham?"

"Yes, she'd lent it to me to do some shopping——"

"She wasn't with you herself?"

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"No."

"The Saints be praised. But—did you say anything about seeing me?"

"Not a word. I never speak of you to Edith, for—well, I can't help fancying she rather liked you, and has a feeling as if you'd slighted her, though she doesn't visit it on me. And though, in your day, there was no Mr. Barr-Simons in the field, she may have talked to him about you, and made him jealous. Otherwise he would hardly know of your existence."

"Oh, wouldn't he? He would probably be glad to hear to-morrow that I'd ceased to have one."

"Hugh! What do you mean?"

"I'd rather not explain, girlie, especially while you're in his house. Tell me things about yourself, and about dear little Mater, and—the Governor."

"They're both well. Mama's as sweet and gentle as ever, and—and as deadly afraid of upsetting papa. And he—oh, dearest, he's just the same about you, just as hard and unforgiving. He was so proud of you, you know. It was all mixed up with his pride of family, and everything. He isn't conceited, of course; he's miles above that. But I suppose it is rather unusual for a peer to become a parson; and people have always told him how noble and wonderful he was. He did so want you to follow in his footsteps, and he hates not getting what he wants."

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"So do I. No doubt I've inherited it."

"Oh, if you only could have got what you wanted! If you could have made a great, great success in your chosen work—the work you would choose in spite of everything—maybe, in the end, papa would gradually have found himself forgiving you. But——"

"Well, Kittens? Don't be afraid to finish."

"I'd rather die than hurt your feelings, Hugh, dear; but—it's awfully sad and disappointing, isn't it, that you're just—just nothing but a mechanic still? Not a common mechanic, of course. Even those horrid blue overalls look picturesque and romantic on you, because you're such a gentleman, and so handsome. Still, it almost broke my heart to see you in them yesterday, and when I got back to Edith's I cried. I was dying to stop the brougham here, and follow you in, but of course, I didn't dare. Edith's maid was with me. She's most particular, and won't let me stir out of the house alone—so different from what she used to be when you thought her fast and manny. Then, there wasn't another free moment till to-day. I thought half the night about plans to get at you—I took it for granted that this was the place where you were working, and that I should find you here—and at last I hit on an idea. I made Edith drop me at Mrs. Edwardes'—my old governess, you know—the second one—and she'll call for me there after a big bazaar

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which I said would tire me to death. I shall have to be back at Eddie's in an hour, so you see we must just talk seventeen to the dozen in the little time we have together."

"Dear old Kittens!" said my Master in a nicer tone than he had ever used to me, so nice that I was almost jealous of the girl he called "Sheila," and "Kittens," though she was so pretty, and so like him that I couldn't help feeling soft toward her. But, perhaps, it was partly that oil in my crank-chamber.

"So you came to me, though you thought my blue overalls were a sign of failure! Good little girl. I always knew you were a trump, and I'd have given anything to write or hear from you. But you had to promise the Governor, just as—the Mater did."

"Yes. I was sure you understood. But, oh, Hugh, *aren't* you a failure, then?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course I can. Are you going to tell me one? How splendid! Do shut the door."

"Not necessary. No one would guess that the lovely young lady in white muslin is the sister of the mechanic in blue overalls, dear; and—we can't be overheard. There's my secret." And he pointed to me. "Such a dead secret that you and I are standing between it and the door which has never been open so long since I hired the premises for purposes of my

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own. It's a secret that, I hope and believe, is going to win me fame and fortune, enough of both to reconcile the Governor to everything I've done, perhaps even to make him and all of you a little bit proud of me. It's such a big secret that I live in constant fear of having it found out and being robbed of my triumph—my triumph that I've worked so hard—you can't guess how hard—to earn."

"How you're making my heart beat!" exclaimed the girl. "Go on—tell me everything."

"It will be difficult to make you understand. You don't know anything about motor-cars, and this——"

"But I do—I know lots. I've learned things, for your sake. We were always such chums, you and I, and you were so good and patient with me, though I must have seemed a silly little wretch to a boy six years older than I. It broke my heart to have you go away—to know you were being turned out. It spoiled home for me—and having to promise, almost swear, to papa not to write. You know how he makes one do things; and you said, too, it would be better to obey him, that day when we told each other good-by."

"I was right. You couldn't have gone on living at home if you'd disobeyed, and I'd nothing to give you then that could make up. But it will be different soon. I shall have things to offer."

"As if things could make any difference! But I

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want you to know what I did, when you left us to be as papa said, a 'common mechanic.' I bought books about motor-cars and read them and talked to people. And it's the one subject on which I can think of a word to say to Gilbert Barr-Simons."

"Dear, the less you have to say about motor-cars to him, in connection with my affairs, the better for me."

"Why, Hugh, do you mean something special?"

"Yes, very special. I'll tell you one day, perhaps, for I know I can trust my little sister to the death. Otherwise I wouldn't be talking to her as I'm talking now about my secret. You say you've learned things concerning motors. Well, now's the time for you to prove how much you know. You see those drawings on the walls?"

As my Master asked his sister this question I felt a rush of petrol to the carbureter. When he alluded to the drawings on the wall he alluded to me.

I had known for some time that they were there, for I had often heard Hugh and the man who helped him speak of these designs, and no sooner had I seen my Master to-day, than I gazed long and earnestly at them. They were diagrams, illustrating all my different parts, and, though at first I was conscious of shame at seeing all my most sacred organs exposed in such a conspicuous manner, I had already grown

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accustomed to the idea, and was immensely interested in the meaning of my own inner workings and outer features. It is a good thing for an automobile, as well as a person, to know itself exactly as it really is; and my examination of the beautifully accurate drawings was not calculated to lower my self-esteem. I could see by them that everything about me was as perfect as genius and skilled workmanship could make it. Also, I believed, judging from those poor common things I had caught a glimpse of in the next room, that there was something extraordinarily new and remarkable in my organization. No wonder my Master and his employee hid me here, as if I were the Grand Lama of Tibet; while other less aristocratic motors stood outside, jumbled up with sordid lathes, screw-cutting and planing-machines.

Now Hugh was going to explain me to his sister, telling her all the things I knew about myself and him, probably a great many that I didn't, but would like to. I listened with all my valves.

"There on the walls," said he, "are the plans that have kept me busy, heart and soul and mind, for the last twelve months. Here before you is the plans' completion"; and he pointed to me.

"What a queer-looking machine, dearest. Is it going to be a motor-car?"

"I should rather think it was going to be a motor-

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car. More than a year of my past life, all my future, and every penny I have in the world are in that piece of mechanism, bless it. 'Champion' I've named it, for luck; and if Champion doesn't turn out a champion after all, why, I'm a ruined as well as a disappointed man."

When I heard that I gulped in too much air by mistake into my carbureter, which made such an odd gurgling noise that Miss Sheila gave a little jump, and glanced round as if she expected to see a ghost. Even Hugh looked puzzled, as if wondering what on earth was the matter with me; but after the first shock of excitement I didn't betray my private feelings any further. I satisfied myself by tightening up my piston-rings, at a place where I knew there was a little escape of gas. It seemed the one way in which I could manage at the moment to show Hugh that I would do all, and more than all, that he expected of me; but I'm afraid he didn't notice.

His whole fortune, his whole future, depending on me! My cylinders chilled at the thought of such a responsibility. But I knew that I had the power as well as the will to justify his expectations.

"Uncle Malcolm's money," said Sheila.

"Yes," my Master repeated, "Uncle Malcolm's money. Good old Uncle Malcolm; if it hadn't been for him, I suppose I should have had to cave in to

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the Governor. But no, I couldn't. Of all things on earth, the last one I'm fitted to be is a parson, and you know that, Kittens."

"You'd have made a dangerously handsome curate," said she, giggling, "and there'd have been dreadful havoc among the girls."

"Well, thank Heaven—and Uncle Malcolm, who's there now—that I did have the money to see me through, on the way I wanted to go—the only way for me. It's made me a skilled mechanician, a skilled engineer, I may say without conceit. I don't think there's much to know about motors that I haven't learned in the most practical schools, in these last years since I left home; all the knowledge I was continually trying to get as a boy I've got now—at my fingers' ends."

"I remember how you invented the dearest little motor-car for my doll, before motors were heard of in London," laughed Sheila.

"Well, Champion's the development of that—the fine flower of that seed. She—no, he—for Champion's nothing if he's not masculine—is something absolutely new in automobiles. He is the perfect achievement of the idea over which a dozen men have bungled; at least, I have every reason to hope and believe so, and the test will come next month, with the Vander-voorst cup-race. It's a race for inventors."

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"I know. I've heard Gilbert Barr-Simons talking about it. He expects to win with a car he's been having made in his motor-works."

"He won't, because I'm going to win it with a car I've been making in my motor-works."

"Yours? Why, have you——"

"Behold them, my child. I didn't want to sell my invention, which, unless I'm much mistaken, is the very thing Barr-Simons is trying to work out. If I did, others would reap the reward, and I should be forgotten; so, when my idea had taken clear form in my brain, I put every penny I had into the experiment, determining to make a specimen car, with as little help as possible, and run it in this race. If the cup had been offered to fit my plans it couldn't have suited them better, for any man who has invented a novelty is invited to compete without explaining the mechanism until the race is over—quite a new thing in the way of motor-racing, and very sporting of Vandervoort."

"Gilbert Barr-Simons knows him," said Sheila.

"I don't, but I hope to. I'm not much in the way of knowing American or other millionaires at present; but I'm biding my time, and I don't think I shall have to wait long before Vandervoort and all the big fellows who're mad about motoring will take as much interest in me as I do in them. I've been working here

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in secret, you know, Kittens, with only one man to help me. I wouldn't have had him if I could have done without any one; but there were things I couldn't manage single-handed. I took this workshop, which has been costing me a pot of money, a lot more than you'd think possible to look at it, and I and my man, Arnaud—a clever chap I brought over from the Fernand-Panton works in France, where I learned more than anywhere else—have had access to the casting-shops and forges, and all that. Not another soul except Arnaud and I have touched any important part of my motor in the making; yet there she stands, perfection—a revolutionizer.”

“You called her ‘him’ a little while ago.”

(I gurgled at this; I could not help it, but nobody heard me. The handsome brother and sister were absorbed in each other, though the conversation was of me.)

“Oh, well, one's used to saying ‘she,’ when one speaks of a car. But Champion is altogether exceptional. He combines the best qualities of the male and female, so it doesn't much matter which you call him. As a masculine motor and the knightly gentleman he is, Champion will never fail me through any hysterical whimsies, I know.”

(“I must live up to that,” I thought.)

“Why have you been so secretive?” asked Sheila.

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"Because, my child, others are on the road toward making the discoveries I've made, though no one else has yet reached the end. Barr-Simons is the nearest to it, I think, but he's come to a standstill now, for the want of one little inspiration which my guardian angel popped into my head a year ago. Motor people aren't exactly saints; and if anybody got on to my idea before I was ready to patent it——"

"But why don't you patent it?"

"Because—Barr-Simons has been very fond of the Patent Office lately."

"Oh, Hugh, you don't mean——"

"I'm afraid I do. He wouldn't stop at anything. On the day of the race, when it's too late for him or any one else to cheat me out of the ten thousand pounds I hope Champion's going to win, I shall patent my invention. It's a risk to delay, of course; but I have my own reasons for thinking it's a worse risk the other way."

"Is Gilbert Barr-Simons a man like that?—Edith's husband!"

"Gilbert Barr-Simons is a man exactly like that; and perhaps all the more because he is Edith's husband. You see, he knows that the Pater was keen on her marrying me, in the old days when she used to visit us. He'd got a silly, jealous notion, I fancy, that she liked me——"

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"So she did."

"Pooh, I don't believe it. Anyhow, a schoolgirl fancy for a boy of her own age. But she is of our sort, our class; and he—well, he's Barr-Simons."

"Do you think he's half Spanish? He's very dark."

"In some of his dealings as well as complexion. Poor Edith! But he's got a few millions, and I dare say he's good to her."

"He gives her the loveliest pearls! But he's often cross."

"I wish you were out of his house, Kittens."

"So do I, after what you've told me—now I know he's your enemy."

"If that were all! There are other things. But I can rely on you not to mention our meeting? If you did, he'd find some way of getting out of you what I'm doing, and what you've seen."

"Can you trust your Frenchman?"

"I believe I can. I have to. If he were a traitor—but I won't even think of it. That way madness lies. And so far as I can, I have identified his interests with mine."

My Master and his sister were speaking together in very low tones, so low that nobody outside could have distinguished a word of their conversation, not even a listener at the door which Hugh had for the first time left ajar. The two were standing close to me, screen-

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ing my form from view, if any one had tried to peep in. No one had, but when they had reached this point in their talk my valves told me that Jean Arnaud was crossing the big outer room, coming back to his master and to me, after finishing lunch. I heard his step; also I heard him whistle a little French air which got on my electric wires in the most irritating way, though it was a favorite of his. How different from my dear Master's whistling and singing it was! All through my long probation one of my highest pleasures had been to listen dreamily when Hugh whistled or hummed his favorites; and I knew that till the day of my break-up I could never forget "The March of the Cameron Men," and "Charlie, will ye no come back again?"

Those were the airs I liked best, the ones which thrilled me most, especially the "Cameron Men," for I knew that my Master was a Cameron. Jean Arnaud, besides calling him "Monsieur," sometimes addressed him as "Monsieur Cameron."

I have not said anything about Jean Arnaud until now, for two reasons. One is that he was away at his lunch when I was actually born into the full vigor of life; therefore, at the beginning of my real career, it was—as it ought rightfully to have been—my Master and Hero who made upon me the first tremendous impression. The second reason is that what I did dimly

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know of Jean Arnaud, in my transition stage, I did not particularly like.

I always thought he had a hard, vivisectioning way with him, as he screwed strange little plugs with platinum points into the heads of my cylinders, and did other things to me without any of that caressing tenderness Hugh showed in every touch. It was easy for even a half-alive automobile, in progress of making, to see that my Master's one absorbing interest was his creation; but Arnaud, though there was no denying his quickness and cleverness, gave the impression of being absent-minded sometimes. If I had known as much about the world as I know now, I should have said to myself, in Jean's own language: "*Cherchez la femme*"; while as for my dear Hugh Cameron, in those days there wasn't a girl in the universe whose society he would have preferred to mine.

Now, as Jean Arnaud came toward the half-open door, he was whistling that little French chanson, pretty enough, but meant for a woman's voice. I didn't think much about it then, for I was deadly tired of it, and it stopped suddenly just outside the door. But afterward I had good cause to be haunted by that air. It was called: "*La Belle 'Toinette*."

CHAPTER II.

I Am Dressed.

Arnaud's coming put an end to any confidences between my Master and Miss Sheila, or if there were any more they must have been exchanged when Hugh saw his sister to the outer door, and bade her good-by. When the girl was gone, I realized that the presence of a pretty creature of that kind brightened up a place wonderfully, and I felt that I might be capable of growing deeply attached to one of them.

Arnaud was interested and curious, I could tell, by the way he looked over his shoulder after my Master and Sheila, as they turned to go away. I was sure he would have liked to ask questions about the young lady, but of course he could not very well, for the Master and he were not on that sort of terms. Even if I had been able to speak, I should have kept mum, for my Master's business was his business and nobody else's, unless it was a little bit mine. But though I wasn't very fond of Arnaud, I would never have believed him capable of taking advantage of that visit of Miss Sheila's, as he did.

The rest of the day, I was encouraged to keep quiet, but next morning, earlier than the ordinary time for

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their arrival, I heard Hugh's voice, and Arnaud's, at the door. There was an unusual stir and excitement, and evidently some heavy objects were being brought in. When the door was shut and locked again, Hugh came and took off the wrapping with which he was accustomed to cover me up when I was left alone.

"Now we'll see how she likes her new clothes," said he to Jean.

It was a little confusing to be called "he" sometimes, and then "she." But I felt that I understood what my Master meant. No doubt he had made me with a dual nature, and at certain moments my masculine attributes were uppermost, at others my feminine. And I must confess that no little seven-horse power, girly-girly car could have pricked up her valves at the sound of the word "clothes" much more eagerly than I did. I hoped that I was going to be well and becomingly dressed. At present, I knew, there must be something a little bizarre about me, or Sheila would not have been surprised to hear that I was really an automobile.

"Easy now," said my Master; and then he and Arnaud carefully lifted me from the floor, to which, until this moment, I had been attached. As he took me up, Hugh whistled "The March of the Cameron Men," and to my joy, it was in tune with that stirring music which I loved, that I was fitted into a deliciously com-

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fortable, oblong frame of steel, strong yet light. What stays must be to a woman, that frame instantly became for me, and I knew that I should never be at my best without it. Fastened to this frame or chassis, into which I slipped, was a neat gray body, as plain yet elegant as the tailor-made dress Sheila had worn yesterday. It had two small seats side by side, and was quite different from the bodies of the poor, common things lurking in the next room. Probably, I explained to myself, this was because I was going to be a racer, while they were every-day jog-trot creatures, rubbing along with a few horse-power.

While I was being dressed, I caught sight of four beautiful wheels, which I knew must be for me, and I was impatient to try them on; but I had plenty of time to conquer that impatience before the chance came.

Time, as time, had hardly existed for me until yesterday, when I was formally born, for all had been so dim and dreamy that yesterdays merged into to-days and to-days into to-morrows without my feeling the difference. But now, since I had once been set going, I was able to measure seconds by my own piston-strokes; and I knew too well that days passed before I was fully clad, with all my accessories attached. The uses of some of these I found myself understanding and appreciating by instinct, and the sensation of ease

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they gave—my wheels especially—but several things were puzzling, and most of all a curious object which Hugh and his assistant apparently thought more important than anything else. It was a very queer thing, and such experience as a glimpse or two of those other cars had given, afforded me no clue to its uses. But the wheels pleased me so much that I did not fret about this contrivance, hoping to learn eventually what I was to do with it.

My Master had made my wheels, not contented with mere ready-made things such as can be fitted on to any car; and I learned from his conversaton with Jean that they were the first of their kind—an experiment of which I was to be trusted to make the test. They had floating rims, and springs to take up all vibration from the road—that wonderful, unknown road which I was panting to try; and Hugh told Jean that he was certain they would let me feel no shocks, no matter how rough the going might be. Though the tires were of iron, he would warrant I should “ride as easily as the Lord Mayor in his coach.”

“Yes, Monsieur,” answered Arnaud, always outwardly sympathetic, “if our motor could feel, she would be intoxicated by the resilience of her own wheels.”

“She can feel,” answered Hugh, with a good laugh of pride in me; and I loved him more than ever for

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understanding. I could not have borne to be no more to him than a stick or a stone.

One of Hugh's wisest arrangements for my speed and comfort, as I could tell from the moment we came together, was the air-cooling of my cylinders. Without this contrivance the heat of my endeavors would have developed into such a fever that I should have flown into a delirious frenzy, burnt up all my oil, and have made my cylinder-walls red-hot. But Hugh's thoughtfulness had provided each one of my six cylinders with a light aluminum case, closed at the top and open below. A powerful fan, which I learned in a flash to drive myself, pumped a constant stream of delicious cool air all round my combustion-chambers and the walls of my cylinders, so that I could work my hardest, putting forth all my tremendous energy, without turning a hair.

These details and others I could have explained to the stupidest automobile that grunted and guzzled in the adjoining room; but fitted to my chassis was a thing that utterly bewildered me. All my cleverness and imagination I focused upon it in vain, looking from it to the diagram where it was pictured—from the diagram back to the thing itself. It was a kind of winged screw, but what had I to do with a screw, or what had a screw to do with me? Were not my hundred and twenty horses—those fierce steeds of fire

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I carried in my breast—strong enough and brave enough to help me through any ordeal, without the aid of an irrelevant thing like that? I did not approve of the mysterious screw, which worried me like a hidden pin; but I loved my horses, my hundred and twenty horses, so much more alert and reliable than the cumbersome quadrupeds I could hear trotting heavily past the window of the workshop. But then, how could one expect a creature which exists by chewing hay to equal in brilliant achievements a being that inhales fiery petrol as the very breath of life?

The day I heard Hugh say I was finished and ready for my first trial, I was thinking hard about that strange screw when my master had gone out to dine.

Since I had been got into my body and had my wheels on I was never left alone, night or day. When Hugh went out, Arnaud stayed, when Arnaud was off duty, Hugh was by my side. Even at night one of the two slept in the workshop, and somehow I felt in my chassis that these extra precautions had a connection with that everlasting screw. Now that I had had time to get used to all my other parts, and the novelty was wearing off, I had nothing particular to think of except my coming trials and—the screw. What was it for? Why did they speak of it below their breath? Why did they have the air of considering it more than anything else? Though it was part

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of myself, I was growing almost jealous of the thing. I suppose I felt rather as a girl might feel if she wanted her lover to admire her eyes, or her hair, and he forgot them in staring at one of her finger-nails, which he persisted in considering unique.

Hugh had gone to his dinner, as I said, and was going to have a sleep after a long day of hard work. Then, at ten o'clock, he intended to come back and take me out for my "first spin." He would be fresh after a little rest, he told Arnaud, and "fit to drive the Champion as a champion should be driven." Meanwhile Jean, who had been off during the day from twelve to four, was to keep guard over me—I could guess why, since I'd heard that conversation between Hugh and Sheila—eat his dinner in my society, and not leave me until his master returned.

Whenever Jean was off duty, and Hugh and I alone together, he always talked to me, and said things so good to hear that they nearly gave me a rush of petrol to the cylinders. But Arnaud never had a word for me, unless, perhaps, it was a cross one, if inadvertently I gave him trouble. I believe that he sincerely admired and was proud of me, for he was the kind of man to value anything he worked upon himself; and, of course, though I was due to my Master's genius, I owed something—a good deal, according to his idea—to Jean Arnaud, as well.

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To-night, as the moments dragged on, he grew more and more restless. I think there must have been something electrical in the air, and every wire in me responded to it; but perhaps it was partly the thought of going out into the world for the first time, of showing Hugh what I could do for him, that affected me. In any case, I was in no mood to be jarred upon by Arnaud's fretful exclamations, which mostly shaped themselves into grumblings against me, or even against our Master.

"Why couldn't he have chosen another night?" Jean growled to himself, as he ate something out of a red napkin which contained his dinner. "To-morrow night—any night but this one night when she had asked me to be with her? Supper with her!—and to have missed it—a chance I would give a year's pay for. Nothing would suit him but it must be to-night. Serve him right for his selfishness if the car goes wrong!"

At this, no air-cooling contrivance on earth could have kept my cylinders from getting hot if my engine had been working. Why, my very oil would have boiled to hear him talking like that about Hugh, our Master, his benefactor. As it was, I grew colder with rage, and more rigid.

As he ate, Arnaud was walking about the workshop in his nervous way, eating sandwiches, and even dar-

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ing to drop crumbs on my body. Suddenly he began to gird at me. "You!" he exclaimed furiously. "Why should I be sacrificed for you? It is a madness that monsieur will have you watched and chaperoned as if you were a beautiful young lady every man was wanting to kidnap. All the world is not thinking of you. Nobody would break in and steal your secrets if I were to go away for an hour—the hour that he spends in comfortable sleep. Yet for you I must give up a joy greater than any I have ever known—a joy that will never come to me again, because I have appeared to slight it. An invitation from the incomparable 'Toinette—and I have been forced to refuse it—for you."

With that he gave me a kick on one of my driving-wheels, as an angry groom might kick a horse on the ankle, and I wished that I were a horse that I could have paid him back with a bite. I did manage to spill a drop of lubricating-oil onto him, but that was nothing to what I should have liked to do.

As if this exhibition of temper had relieved his feelings, or as if the name of 'Toinette had put the thought of his tiresome chanson into his head, he began to sing, "La belle 'Toinette, ma belle 'Toinette!" and while he was humming and brushing crumbs off his jacket, there came a light, but distinctly audible, tapping at the window.

CHAPTER III.

I See 'Toinette.

At the same moment, a clock which stood on a shelf by the door began to strike, as if the unexpected sound had startled it. It struck eight; and my Master was not due to come back for two hours yet. Besides, he never rapped at the window. Nobody had ever rapped at the window since I had been I. Who could be there, wanting to come in at this hour?

No light was shining out, to tell passers-by that the room was occupied at a time when other workshops were shut up and deserted. I felt a curious, excited vibration running through my whole electrical system, and I could see that Arnaud was surprised, too. Evidently the knocking was as unexpected to him as to me; and somehow I was glad of that.

He stopped humming and stared at the window, which was now nothing but a dim, bluish square cut out of the deep brown dusk of the room; for we never used lights at night, except that of an electric lantern when really necessary. My Master did not wish to attract attention to the fact that any one remained in the workshop so long after hours; and as it was still August, the twilight lingered late.

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For a few seconds Arnaud did not move, even after the tapping came again, in a different way. I wondered if some little vagabond who had wandered into the narrow side street was amusing himself by playing a tune on our window-panes; but presently I discovered that the air the unseen fingers were rapping out was a familiar one: "La belle 'Toinette." And then a voice began to sing very softly, very sweetly, the French words I had so often heard Arnaud humming.

He seemed to fling himself across the room in one great stride, and was pushing up the window, which had been open only a little way at the top, to let in air. "Mademoiselle 'Toinette!" he whispered like a man in a dream.

Somebody laughed, a gay, coquetting laugh. "You would not come to me; voilà, I have come to you!" said the voice that had sung the verse of "La Belle 'Toinette."

"It is too good to be true," said Arnaud.

"It is true at least that you do not deserve such a good thing," laughed the voice; and try as I might, I could not catch even a sidewise peep at the speaker. "You did not think I knew where you spent these long days of work you told me of—no? But you have said the name of the street."

"I—don't remember mentioning it," stammered Arnaud,

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"What—you forget what you say to me? That is not a compliment!"

"I never forget what you say to me," he hurriedly answered, which seemed to please Mademoiselle 'Toinette.

"That is better," she exclaimed. "And now, will you not open your door and come round to let me in?"

"Let you in?" Arnaud stammered again. "I—much as I should love to do that, I may not. I am under a solemn promise——"

"Pooh for your solemn promise! What is that to me? If you do not at once invite me in to make a call upon you, I shall know that all your words of love are worth nothing. In one all little half-hour, I shall have to go, because it will then be time for my turn at the Tivoli. My brougham is waiting for me just round the corner. I have told the coachman I shall not come for twenty-five minutes. Will you that after all I go back to him now instead?"

"No—no. I beg that you will stay and let me talk to you here. I have a thousand things to say," implored Arnaud, so desperately that I began to feel a little sorry for him. "I have to tell you what I have already partly told in my letter—my answer to your dear note—that not to come and wait for you and take you to supper to-night, as you would have permitted, was sad as death to me——"

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"All that I will hear when you have let me in. It is not comme il faut that I should be kept standing in a dark alley, below your window, like a young Spanish lover who talks to a sweetheart. I have believed in your regret, or I should not be here; but in a moment more I shall cease to believe; and then I will never speak to you again. It is for you to choose."

"Then I choose, and I break my promise, for you!" cried Arnaud. "After all, it is not as if Monsieur Cameron, my employer, never broke the rule he has made for us both. A fortnight ago he brought in a young lady. I found her here in the workshop when I came back from my déjeuner. Also, the door was partly open, and the motor uncovered. It was as if he had forgotten himself. Now, he has no longer a right to blame me, if I, too, am a little weak where a beautiful woman is concerned. Mademoiselle, it will save time, and be a great happiness to me, if you permit that I lift you in at the window."

She laughed, and said, with a mock English accent: "All right, I permit." And in another moment she was in the room in front of my bonnet. Also, she was in Arnaud's arms, and he was kissing her. He must have thought that I was blind and deaf.

I could not see the visitor very distinctly at first, but she insisted that it was too triste in the dusk, and that "Monsieur Jean must light something."

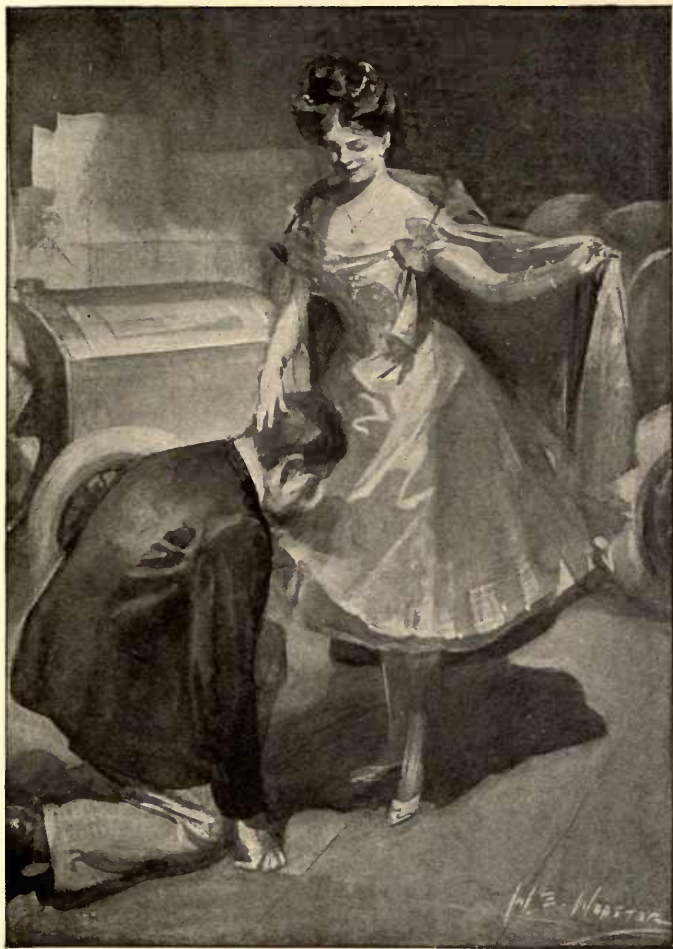
Champion

He was too intoxicated with joy now to object to any wish of hers, it seemed, and without a word he turned on the light which belonged to my Master, a big electric lantern. It ate up the darkness, and in a pale, glimmering circle, like a picture framed in black, I saw Mademoiselle 'Toinette standing.

She was a bewitching creature. Arnaud had some excuse for his madness, perhaps.

Her head was bare, and a long, orange-colored cloak, tied loosely with ribbons at the throat, was thrown back, and hung in straight folds behind her lithe French figure, in its short, green-and-silver sequin-covered dress. There was a wreath of glittering green and silver leaves on her elaborately waved, copper-bright hair; a diamond pendant rising and falling on her white neck; a snake of diamonds with emerald eyes clasping her tiny waist; her green silk stockings were embroidered over the instep with little brilliants; and her silver slippers had great flashing buckles. With all this sparkle and dazzle, the fire of her big black eyes that caught the light, and the scarlet of her lips that parted over little milk-white teeth, Arnaud's visitor was a bewildering vision. I was not surprised to see him fling himself on his knees and kiss the hem of the shimmering green dress.

"To think that you should have come to me!" he faltered; and Mademoiselle patted his hair with a



"MADEMOISELLE PATTED HIS HAIR."

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white hand flashing with rings. She was wonderful, but, somehow, she did not seem fresh and sweet, or real, like Sheila. She looked older and harder, and you would not have cared to have her near if your steering-gear had gone wrong, or you had smashed an axle, or anything that made you feel sick and sad all over. Arnaud couldn't see her face as she patted his head, but I could, and it had an expression as if she were making fun of him in her heart, instead of loving him, as he was conceited enough to believe.

"I have come," she said softly, "because I wanted to see you, and because I wanted to see this wonderful work of yours, which makes me jealous. Oh, yes, I am jealous. You think more of your work than you do of me. You would sacrifice me for it."

"Never!" cried Arnaud, still on his knees, adoring. "I like the work, because I can do it well. One always likes what one does well. And I am faithful to it because of what it can by and by do for me. When I and Monsieur Cameron win the race I told you of, I shall be rich. I can give you presents, then, worth having; not the paltry things which, until now, have been all I could afford to offer."

"I do not love you for the presents you have sent," said Toinette, with a ring of truth in her voice. Then why did she love him? I was sure it was not for himself.

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"Sweet, soft angel," murmured Arnaud, snatching both her hands. If I had been working I should certainly have snorted. She was about as sweet and soft, and as much like an angel, as I was.

"I have loved the presents because you gave them," she went on. "This dear emerald ring—my favorite stone. See, I am wearing it to-night. This bracelet with the drop pearl. It was the second thing you sent me. I have still the note that came with it—written before we knew each other—before you dreamed of knowing me, I believe—you were so respectful. 'From a compatriot and a humble admirer of the fairest transplanted flower of France.' Those were your very words. Do I not remember well?"

"You make me die of happiness," mumbled Arnaud.

"Oh, you must not die. You must live to win your great race, about which you have roused me to excitement. And this big, gray thing, with the long, strange body—is this the marvel, the great invention you and your Monsieur Cameron have made together?"

He and Monsieur Cameron together, indeed! I could have burst a cylinder. As if Arnaud had had anything to do with me, except to work under our Master's instructions!

"Yes, this is our marvel," he replied, unctuously accepting the credit. He jumped up, now, and would have put his arm round that tiny waist of mademoi-

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selle's, but she pushed him away gently with a coquettish little laugh.

"Not now," she said. "I wish to be shown the wonderful thing which is to bring you fortune. Perhaps, when you are rich, I shall say 'Yes' to you, is it not?"

"You would—you would consent?" he stammered. "Let us talk of the future, then."

"No. Of your automobile that is to make the future—our future."

Arnaud looked pale and uncomfortable. Evidently he did not like the turn the conversation was taking; he wished to defend himself and me from her wilful curiosity, but I knew that he would yield. I knew that she would be too strong for him—and she was. After a minute or two of clumsy fencing, he lost his head completely. I believe it was a kiss which finished him, but whatever it was, it made him abject. He forgot all his obligations—he was hers, body and soul; the mean little soul of him!

He snatched off my bonnet, and brazenly exposed my inner workings to the lady. But his fingers were cold and trembling as he grasped the starting-handle. Nervously he let it drop, without turning.

"After the work she did this morning, she ought to start on the switch," he said. "The compression's perfect, and there's sure to be enough in one cylinder or the other."

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With this, he turned on the switch, Mademoiselle eying me in such a queer, eager way that it suddenly struck me she knew a good deal more about automobile-kind than she was pretending to know. A queer idea began to mix with my electricity; and if I could, I would have protected my master's interests by refusing to answer. But I was too well made for that; and the best I could do was to hastily suck into my carbureter a few of the hardest crumbs which Arnaud had carelessly dropped onto me a little while ago. I managed to sniff them into such a position that they clogged the needle-valve, which was exactly what I wanted, as it gave me a chance of just exploding once or twice and then coming to a stop for lack of petrol. Naturally I made matters as bad as I could by drawing in unnecessary air and gurgling loudly.

"Oh, but something is wrong," cried Mademoiselle innocently. "It will not go."

"It will go beautifully," said Arnaud, anxious to justify his reputation as an inventor of a marvel, and turning away at the starting-handle with silent fury.

"Then explain it, if you please," insisted Toinette, looking at me, with her hand on his shoulder. "I know I am stupid about automobiles, for the language of them is as Greek to my ears. Still, I shall be flattered if you make me think myself clever enough to understand."

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At least, I began to think myself clever enough to understand her. I had not been given my perfect mechanism for nothing; and it flashed into my cylinders that this enticing young woman was playing a deep game with Jean Arnaud. What might be her object I could not tell yet, but an ominous weight of dread pressed upon my wires.

Bewitched, Arnaud poured out the most intimate details of my construction, while she listened, trying to veil her sharp interest behind a bewildered smile. "One of our secrets is this new device for cooling by air," he went on fatuously. "It's been tried many times, but never with complete success. This time there is no fear of failure. All is perfect—volumes of air pumped with scientific precision on to the cylinders exactly where needed. No weight of water to carry—a dozen complications saved. No pipes to get loose, no tanks to leak, no pump to go wrong, no radiator. And the changes of speed are made with compressed air, too."

While he talked, Arnaud never stopped twisting my starting-handle, but do what he would, I had made up my mind not to start. Of course, I might easily have flooded the carbureter, and expelled the crumbs, but I had no intentions of relenting.

"Sale bête!" grumbled Arnaud under his breath. "I've never seen her like this before. But it is always

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so, if you wish to show off with an automobile." He searched about for the cause of my stubbornness, but did not think of looking at the carbureter.

"What is this odd thing in front?" asked Mademoiselle, pointing to my strange screw. My valves quivered at this, but all the same, I hoped Arnaud would tell her nothing. I wanted to know the mystery myself, but I did not want her to know it.

"Everything I have told you is a secret," replied Jean, "but this is the profoundest secret of all. You will swear never to repeat a word of what I say to you now?"

"But whom should I tell, great stupid?" laughed the pretty lady of the sequins. "And by the time I leave you, do you suppose I shall remember two consecutive words well enough to make sense of them? Still, I like to hear you speak of these things—and to watch your face as you talk. You have such a handsome, clever face, my Jean."

This last was a bigger fib than the rest, but Arnaud swallowed it all and was delighted. He was so enmeshed by her now that he threw his last rag of prudence under foot for her to trample with her little high heels. "This is a kind of aerial screw-propeller," he went on, "like the screw-propeller of a ship, adapted to an automobile. But instead of propelling, like an ordinary screw, it sucks, like a fan."

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'Toinette clapped her hands, as he paused. "Oh, do show me how it works!" she exclaimed. "That is a most wonderful idea of yours. I must see it going, so that I can be proud of you."

Again he tried to start me, but I would have burnt up where I stood rather than give a single spark. Of course, since I chose to behave like a dead thing, Arnaud could not show his 'Toinette how my screw worked. As he flew at my starting-handle for the fifteenth time, the clock by the door struck three, which meant a quarter to nine, and 'Toinette gave a startled cry. "Oh, I had forgotten!" she said. "I must go instantly. I cannot afford to be late for my turn. And when I have sung at the Tivoli, there is only just time—if I take an encore—to rush into my brougham and drive to the Palace. I must say au revoir, but it shall be only that. Write me what is the next night that your Monsieur Cameron will be away about this hour, and I will come to you here again—dressed to go on to the stage, as now, so that I shall have all the moments, up to the last, with you. When I come next time, perhaps your 'marvel' will be in a better humor; and perhaps, too, I shall have a thing to tell you—a great thing that will make your heart beat."

"A thing about you?" asked Jean.

"Yes, about me—and about you; about us both

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together. A thing that may mean much, oh, much money. Enough for you to do what you like."

"Can't you tell me now?" Arnaud begged her.

"No, there is no time. Besides, I must see some one else first, before I dare speak. Oh, I shall be late. Can you open the window again, get out, and then help me? That would be my quickest way. No, no, you must not kiss me again. You will make me miss my turn."

Arnaud switched off the light, and a moment later she was gone, leaving behind a heavy perfume not half so nice, in my opinion, as that of my own honest, life-giving petrol.

CHAPTER IV.

I See the World and Find Myself.

I would have sacrificed my run in the open, and put off my trial indefinitely, if by such self-abnegation I could but have gained the power of telling my Master what had happened in his absence. It was enough to demagnetize my coil that I should be obliged to stand there mute and inexpressive when Hugh came back, all unsuspecting and full of confidence in Arnaud.

That mean, love-sick traitor had covered me up again, thus making of me a dumb conspirator when he answered his Master's question by saying that everything was right, as usual. Yes, he had eaten his dinner in the workshop; afterward he had slept a little; everything had been quiet; the car was ready for the test.

"How about the crumb in my carbureter?" I thought. But it would not have helped to expose Arnaud's perfidy if I had continued obstinate when my Master took me in hand; and the moment he tried to start me, I dislodged the tiny obstacle with an effort which flooded it out with petrol. I saw Jean glare at me viciously when I did for Hugh what I

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had refused to do for him, and I contrived to get a spark of satisfaction out of his discomfiture and surprise.

If it had not been for the disturbing knowledge which I was unable to impart to my Master, I should have been wildly happy as Hugh started me for my first flight into the unknown world.

Arnaud opened the workshop doors and the still larger doors of the big room outside. Hugh slowly drove me through, just as the clock struck ten, and as Arnaud hastily locked up the place and sprang to his seat, we swept out into a wide, deserted thoroughfare.

My only glimpses of the world beyond our workshop had been through the side window which was always kept pulled well down at the top. It was so high that there was no danger of my being spied upon; but I could see a brick wall, and a patch of moonshine or sunlight occasionally lay upon it, which somehow made me feel happy and hopeful, as if it were a shining prophesy of beautiful things to come. From this brick wall, and its shifting patch of gold or silver light; from the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs in the streets; from the men and motors that inhabited the big outer workshop, I had formed my ideas of the world; but I had imagined nothing half so good as the glorious reality into which I plunged like a fish

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into a crystal wave, as my Master guided me into the waiting light.

At first I was entirely preoccupied with the joyous new excitement of turning my wheels, and finding that I advanced faster, faster, faster, always with exquisite smoothness. Then followed an instant of shamed confusion when I realized that I was emitting a cloud of disagreeable-smelling smoke through my silencer. This came because Arnaud had given me too much oil; and disgusted with myself as I was, I thought the best thing I could do was to burn it up and get rid of the horrid stuff as quickly as possible.

Soon, it was gone; then, cheered and controlled by the firm touch of the Master I loved and who loved me, I began to "find myself" and the wonders of the world in which I had been set free. Oh, the stars, and the wind, and the good smell of the night! I sang with joy of life and power, and my song was strong and rhythmical as a mighty poem. It was the full expression of my being, and I gloried in the sound of it.

Just at first, as I rolled round corner after corner of quiet streets—before we shot out into open country with the great gloaming bell of the sky overhead—I had a slight, a very slight stiffness of the joints, in bounding forward. But so minute had been the care lavished on every part of me, that with each yard I

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ran, the beneficent oil was able to penetrate my pores, soothing all aches, giving a magnificent suppleness and sense of well-being.

"Now, now," I said to myself, "I have a chance to show him something of what I feel, my gratitude and loyalty. Let me make him see that he has not labored in vain."

So light was my Master's touch on the steering-wheel that it seemed to testify his confidence in my intelligence. Our relation was so intimate that I felt we were talking to each other, as I rushed on, obedient to his hand. Together we were working now, each with an implicit belief in the other.

My wheels were behaving splendidly. They were so springy that, as Hugh had prophesied, for me road inequalities did not exist. There had been rain during the day—I had heard it coming down—and the asphalt over which we passed on our way out to the country was as buttery as one of Arnaud's favorite sandwiches. I was afraid of slipping when my wheels first slid on to this greasy surface, and so disappointing my Master; but I had reckoned without him. He had thought of all that long before I was born, and had accordingly fitted me with a neat appliance by which I could defy slippery roads. I had small rollers with corrugated surfaces, that ran on the ground inside, and parallel to, my wheels. They were so arranged that, if I

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slipped even a couple of inches, the rollers, tilted slightly, gently scratched the road with their tiny corrugations, and at the same time pushed a wedge into a groove bolted on to the inner side of my wheels. When I began to be sure of my own trustworthiness, it was almost a pleasure to feel the inclination to slip and then right myself on the instant.

Soon we left the labyrinth of streets behind, and flew out upon a broad highroad. How glorious it was to be given my head, and allowed to rush on, on, straight on, without being pulled in for silly little turnings, just as I was getting into the spirit of the thing! I had that delightful sense of fitness which I now know springs from youth, from a sound constitution, and a faultless working together of all organs and functions. I knew that, of my kind, I was perfection, and worthy of the Master who had made me.

He let me take him out into the country on my top speed. So sensitively did I govern myself, under his hand, that I could change from four hundred to twelve hundred revolutions in a fraction of a minute. But though this discovery thrilled me, still I was very far from realizing all my capabilities.

A lonely stretch of road glimmered before us under the high, white stars. Suddenly, Hugh gave me all the gas I could take, and pressed his foot on my accelerator. Whiff! I was off on a race with the wind.

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I felt myself a thing of living fire, and, pulsing with life, I devoured the straight, white miles as if they had been long moonbeams.

I was doing my utmost now, yet there was no strain, and I was deliciously sure that I could keep up the same wild pace for hours on end if my Master would consent, and if there were world enough. The one impediment of which I was conscious was the fierce opposing pressure on my bonnet of the air that with all my strength I forced asunder as I ran, as a swimmer tears apart the water with his hands.

I liked the sense of power which this act gave, for it was I who conquered, and I liked the sound of the baffled wind as I rushed through; still, I grudged being held back ever so little, as I could not deny that I was held back. "If it were not for that wind," I thought, as I hurled myself ahead, "I suppose I could go almost twice as fast. How would that feel, I wonder?"

Hardly had the question been sparked in and out of my cylinders when a marvelous thing happened, and—the great mystery of my being was solved.

With a touch of his foot upon a pedal, Hugh diverted some of my energy from the main-shaft, and I grew instantly conscious that it had been put to turning the winged screw which had caused me so many restless hours. Quick as light, it began to revolve at terrific speed. All pressure of air was gone. The

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wind, instead of being my enemy, had become my friend—my slave. My speed doubled. I seemed to be racing down the vortex of a whirlwind, and keeping pace with it.

* * * * *

All too brief was that flight in ecstasy. The lights of a ridiculous village lay ahead. My Master withdrew my energy from the propeller, which for a few happy moments had made me a winged thing. I ceased to suck in drafts of sparkling air with the fan. The governor tranquilized me in spite of myself; reluctantly I simmered down into a walking pace, thus passing through a sleeping street and out once more into blessed freedom.

No longer was I jealous of the screw. To understand what it could do for me was to value it beyond all my other parts put together, and I was more than ever thankful that I had swallowed one of Arnaud's crumbs to prevent 'Toinette from learning the great secret. As it was, she knew far too much about me, had observed too much with her flashing black eyes, the while she beguiled Arnaud. But this one feature of mine in which I knew—judging from all my Master and Jean had said—that I was so far superior to any other created motor, remained a mysterious feature for the Frenchwoman. I congratulated Hugh and

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myself upon this fact as again I gathered speed and threw myself forward. For the second time, as all lights, save the stars, vanished in our trail, that magical propeller of mine came into action, and my course was like the course of a comet down the Milky Way. Then, at last, we stopped.

My Master sprang from his seat with a sigh of infinite satisfaction, as refreshing to me as a new supply of petrol. Arnaud also scrambled off my back. We three were alone in the still country, and the smell of the earth was passing sweet. Hugh laughed softly, and patted me as he might pat a favorite animal. He felt me all over, too, to see if I were heated; but thanks to the currents of cool air with which I had doused my cylinders, I was in fine condition. "Hurrah, she's only hand-warm!" my master exclaimed, as he took an electric torch and examined every part of me, peering into my gear-box, and inspecting even my clutch—a liberty which I should have resented from any one else.

"Does us proud, doesn't she, Arnaud?" he laughed, in his modest way, which gave the Frenchman a present of far more credit than he deserved. "Not a single part has failed. This test is even more of a triumph for us and the car than I dared hope. I wouldn't let myself count on absolute perfection in the first trial, but that's what we've got, eh? By Jove! if everything

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goes like this on the day of the race—as I'm sure it will now, why shouldn't it—won't we make the whole automobile world sit up? It's been waiting for us. Now it's got us. And I think we may be pretty certain that it will appreciate us. I mean that Champion shall be the goose to lay golden eggs for you, Arnaud, as well as for me. It's right that you should have a good share in the fortune which this invention will bring, for you've been as faithful as you've been efficient. And if I hadn't got hold of a man I could trust, for this big work which now we've finished together, it might just as well never have been begun."

How did Arnaud feel as he listened to these generous praises and promises which would have made swell with joyful gratitude the heart of a man who deserved them?

I tried with all my might to open an exhaust-valve and explode into the air a reproach to him, a warning to my Master. The secret which I could not communicate so rankled and burned within me, that I almost choked with my own gas.

"That's the one drawback to being an automobile," I said gloomily to myself, at this moment which ought to have been one bright blaze of satisfaction. "You can be the king of cars, as I've no doubt I am, since my Master thinks so; but with all your power, you can't save your best friend by hissing out the least

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little thing you know, in words that he can understand. I dare say, if I make any automobile friends I shall find that I can gabble to them 1,200 revolutions to the minute, but with the one being of all the world I would give my crank-heads to talk to, I must remain mute and cold, a mere machine."

Arnaud mumbled something, and his shamed stammering gave the effect of genuine emotion, so that my Master was more pleased with him than ever, and as a reward allowed him to drive half-way home. I would have played several pranks which occurred to me, as a protest, if I hadn't been afraid that they would have been misunderstood, and attributed to incapacity. But I ventured to slow down and stretch myself once or twice, being just lazy enough to please my dear Hugh with the conviction that he could get more out of me than the Frenchman could.

"I am to stop to-night?" Arnaud asked, when I had reluctantly pointed my bonnet into the workshop.

"No," said my Master. "It's your turn, I know, but—well, I suppose it's sentimental, but somehow, after the way she went for us—this first night, you see—I have a feeling I'd like to be with her myself."

"As you please, sir," answered Arnaud, with an exciting ring in his voice, I thought. And as he was hastily wiping my body free from dust, I caught a word or two which he muttered at his task.

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"Perhaps I might be in time yet," I fancied I heard him say. Was he planning a late visit to his 'Toinette?

It was midnight, or close upon it; but maybe he knew where she was supping, and meant to hurry off and try to join her after he had made himself presentable.

I hoped that he would be too late. And I hoped with every fiber of my steel that, if he were capable of drowning conscience and doing our Master further harm, I might in some way be able to circumvent him.

CHAPTER V.

I See the Most Beautiful Girl of All.

Several days passed, during which nothing happened except that I was given two more night trials, and acquitted myself to the satisfaction of all concerned. 'Toinette did not come again, nevertheless I was conscious of a stir of uneasiness under my bonnet.

It seemed to me that Arnaud was not himself. There was little or no work to do upon me now, yet he or else my Master was always at my side; and each one, during his watch, amused himself by pottering away at some little task of oiling, tightening, dusting, or polishing. Hugh had the air of doing this because he loved it, and could not keep his hands off me; but Arnaud fussed over my parts in sheer nervousness. He often fumed about like a mad thing, as if he dared not be idle; and I noticed particularly that he no longer sang or even hummed at his work. Not once since that visit of the beautiful sequined lady had the air of "La Belle 'Toinette," or any other passed his lips. Always he was heavily silent, unless he sighed; or, if alone at night in the shut-up building, burst out with strange, incoherent exclamations, as if his heart overflowed with some pent-up anguish.

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When he and my Master were together in the workshop they talked of the race in which I was to be entered, and I learned that it would be the most unique as well as the greatest event in the history of motoring. Never had there been a race like it, and it was meant to make a sensation.

A young American millionaire had bought a newspaper in London; a newspaper, my Master explained to Arnaud, which had been "down on its luck," until American money and some startling American methods had revived it. Wilfred Vandervoort, the proprietor of *The World Day by Day*, had announced in his paper—and worked up a great boom among automobilists by doing it—that he would offer a ten-thousand-pound cup for a motor-car race for the newest types of automobiles. No car that had not some distinctively novel feature could compete for the Vandervoort Surprise Cup Race; and the word "Surprise" had a special signification as novel as the idea which it embodied. It meant that the competing cars need not be described by their makers or owners before the race, although all winners in the contest must submit to examination by experts immediately after the race was over.

These matters I heard so constantly discussed between Hugh and Arnaud that they became familiar to me, and I was so intensely excited about my

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Master's fate and mine in the coming ordeal that I was delighted when one day Arnaud brought in an illustrated weekly paper with a large full-page photograph of Wilfred Vandervorst. He showed it to my Master, and then, tearing out the leaf, pinned the picture upon the wall where I had it in full sight.

The face in the photograph was so handsome and intelligent—though not, to my mind, to be compared to Hugh Cameron's—that I augured well from it. That young man's method might be sensational, but it was because he was original, not vulgar, I said to myself. And I thought that he looked exactly the sort of person who would be quick to appreciate my Master—and me.

"He'll be there to watch the race," I thought; "and he'll see that justice is done, I'm sure."

There was a photograph of Gilbert Barr-Simons, too, the man of whom Sheila had talked on the day I was born. I had remembered the name because he was an enemy of Hugh's, just as I should have kept in my cylinders the name of any great friend of his, though for a very different reason. They did not pin up his picture on the wall of the workshop, but I had a glimpse of it, as Jean was showing my Master that and photographs of other prominent automobilists interested in the Vandervorst Cup Race. He was not bad looking, this Barr-Simons, who was a rival

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of Hugh Cameron's, I had to admit that; but there was something about the long, dark face and the black, clever eyes that made me think I should be sorry to have the owner for my driver. I wondered whether Sheila were staying with his wife still, or if she had gone away immediately after what she heard from her brother; and whether she would contrive to get over to France in one way or another to see Hugh win the race with his Champion.

For the race was to be run in France. Under the conditions there was no place for it, my Master told Jean, on this side of the Channel; and listening eagerly I heard all the plans being made to take me across the water in a boat. I felt that I should be more easy when the time came for us to go, for out of England Arnaud would have passed away from that influence of his 'Toinette which somehow I dreaded.

We were to start in the evening, after twilight, so that I should not attract any attention, and my Master was to drive me to Newhaven. He had been with me all night before, and had been too excited to sleep or even to keep still. I had never seen him so restless before, and I guessed in my dim, inexperienced way, that the long strain of hard work with suspense at the end, was beginning to tell on his nerves. Perhaps he felt this himself, for when Arnaud came in the morning, Hugh proposed not to come back until late

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afternoon. "I ought to have a good sleep if I can get it," he said, confident of Arnaud's sympathy, "for I shall drive to-night; and I want to be steady as a rock for the day of the race."

Arnaud was somewhat too cordial, it seemed to me, in his wishes for a long rest for Monsieur. "Now is his time to send for his 'Toinette, if he means mischief with her," I thought, quivering on my wheels a little. And as the day crept along I was on the alert; but she did not come. There was one thing, though, that worried me more than usual—for I had never been at peace since the night of 'Toinette's visit. As soon as my Master was well out of the workshop, Arnaud whipped out of his pocket a letter. But though he whipped it out, he opened it carefully; and I soon saw why. Inside were two bits of white paper with engraving of some sort that looked like printed writing, and big black figures on one side of each of them. I know now that they were bank-notes, for I have seen plenty since then; but in those days I could only surmise that they must be valuable, at least to Arnaud. He picked them gingerly from between the pages of his letter, as if he were afraid they might blow away, or be seized by some unseen spy. For a long time he stared first at one and then at the other, looking as if he could have eaten them both, and yet as if he were deadly afraid that some one else would

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come and devour them before he could do it himself. Then he read the letter over twice or thrice, with a sick, anxious expression drawing his face into haggard lines. Finally, after gazing at the notes again, he put them back inside the letter, and stuffed the letter hastily into a breast pocket of his coat.

Not once, but five or six times during the day did he repeat this process; and when he was not re-reading the letter or gazing at its enclosures he walked about, running his fingers through his hair, muttering to himself and groaning. Yet, after my Master came back he did not again take out the letter, nor did he say anything about it.

He had eaten no lunch, though until lately he had always shown a good appetite when he took his meals in the workshop, but he drank nearly a whole flask of some strong-smelling stuff which flushed his face at first, and then turned it yellow.

"You're not knocked out, are you, Arnaud?" asked Hugh kindly. Arnaud said, not at all; he was merely dreading the sea trip. He was such a bad sailor, that it made him bilious only to think of it.

Before we started, the two dismounted my propeller, swathed it up, and packed it carefully away on a platform behind. That being done, after twilight and in the eyes of an amateur, I might have been any other big racing automobile. This was right, of course,

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but I was spoiled by my magical night flights, and it was like being a fish out of water to have to travel without my aerial screw.

It was not once needed, however, for my Master did not ask me for any great speed on the way to Newhaven. We jogged comfortably along, at the childish pace of about thirty to forty miles an hour, outside London, and some time in the night they got me on board a big, ugly, noisy creature that called itself a ship. A lot of gray, wet stuff was splashing up and down, and there was a wild wind that my screw would have sucked up like a glass of water.

I felt a sense of helplessness and ignominy at being strung up by an unsympathetic crane, with all my wheels off the ground, and as for the silly, rolling motion in which that boat indulged herself when she had lolloped out of the harbor, it was undignified and even indecent. I was thankful when she made up her mind, with an idiotic yell, to seek refuge in quiet water again, which turned out to be in Dieppe harbor, on the opposite side of the Channel from which we had started. I was landed in the same disconcerting way in which I had been slung on board; but, after all, my inner workings had not suffered as much on the sea as Arnaud's had, judging from his face.

There we were on a French quay, in the gray of early morning, I a little sulky; but my sulkiness van-

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ished as the darkness of night was vanishing, when I had my Master by my side, and saw how pleased he was to find me in good condition. Still, glad as I was to have him with me, I was sorry to hear him telling Arnaud that he might go off alone to make arrangements for putting in order certain papers which would regularly admit me into France. If I could have spoken my thoughts, I should have begged Hugh not to let Arnaud out of his sight until after the great race was run. I meant to do all that was in me to win it, and I did not see how Arnaud would have the power to prevent me from winning once we had started, for my Master would drive, not he. Still, I had a horrible fear that he was in danger of selling himself, if he had not quite sold himself already to rivals of Hugh's, and I hated to see him given the smallest chance of completing a bargain which perhaps he had not yet sunk to accepting.

If he were in communication with enemies, they were pretty sure to know when we were coming, and I felt in my frame that they would be lying in wait for a few persuasive words with the wretched Arnaud. However, it might have been even worse if my Master had gone off and left me with Jean, for, though it was too late for any one to steal my secret and imitate me before the race, something might be done to me which would put me out of the running.

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When Arnaud had disappeared, Hugh began to take off the tarpaulin which had covered me up for the stormy voyage, and get me ready for our journey to Paris, which we would begin as soon as the formalities of the customs were over. As he worked, I darted interested glances here and there, keen to form impressions of each new part of the world as it came into my experience; and it seemed to me that the people who passed and stared at me were very dull and narrow-minded not to realize that I could see as distinctly as they could, though my faculties were a little different from theirs.

"Fancy these creatures not even knowing that I'm alive, with an independent will—anyhow to a certain extent!" I was saying to myself, when a voice just behind me said in English: "What a wonderful, powerful great gray dragon! I do believe it's alive, and has a soul."

It was a girl's voice which said that—just as sweet as Sheila's, though different; and I was so delighted and so grateful to the one person—besides my Master—who had ever given a sign of understanding my real nature, that I longed to see the speaker, and do something to show my appreciation.

But she was standing behind me, as I said, and I couldn't see so much as the tip of her head, or the toe of her foot. I was sure, though, from her voice,

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that she must be pretty. It wouldn't be good workmanship to waste a lovely voice like that on an ugly creature, any more than it would be to fit a car like me with a little, squeaky bicycle horn.

"Don't talk so loud about the automobile, Lia, or the young man who's working on it will hear, and think we're trying to attract his attention," murmured another voice, not bad in its way, but sounding a bit as if its owner talked through his nose; and if that nose weren't the nose of an old gentleman, I'd have been willing to eat up all my petrol before our start!

"I don't care if he does hear, Dad, for there's no harm in being interested in his automobile, it's such a grand one and looks so different from others, somehow—though I couldn't exactly tell how," said the girl I couldn't see. "I should just love to ask him if he's going to run in the Vandervoort Cup Race all the papers are so full of. I do believe it's to-morrow."

"Pooh!" answered her "dad," in a low, but rather cross tone. "You don't know anything about automobiles, and neither do I—and we don't want to. Come away, Cecilia, and let's get to work at what we do want to do."

"Speak for yourself, Dad. I do want to know things about automobiles, especially this one. But you needn't look anxious. I'm not going to speak to the young man, for the very good reason that he's

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probably French and couldn't understand a word I say."

All this time my Master had been busily unwrapping me, but I could tell by his touch the he was growing a little absent-minded about his work. Suddenly he spoke, laughing in his pleasant way, which I think no creature, whether footed or wheeled, could resist.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but I'm not French, and so I ought to tell you that I've understood, and been very flattered by your kind words about my car. Perhaps your good wishes will bring me luck; for my car and I will be trying our fortunes in the race, as you thought."

"Well, you've the good wishes of both of us, hasn't he, father?" exclaimed the girl.

"Certainly," agreed the old gentleman, politely, if reluctantly; and then they both moved forward, into my view.

My accelerator! but she was pretty. As it happened, the only two other women who had come near enough to me to step into my life in any way, were both beautiful. Hugh's sister, Sheila, and Arnaud's 'Toinette. But this girl was prettier than either Sheila or 'Toinette; prettier than any of the women of whose faces I had caught glimpses here and there in my twilight or moonlight runs.

She was dressed in a dark-blue dress, which was

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short enough to show two adorable little feet in russet brown shoes, feet not much bigger than children's feet, though about a hundred times daintier in shape. On her head was a hat of dark-blue, like her dress, behind it floating fold upon fold of blue veil, which made an effective background for hair exactly the color of a handful of new copper pennies, just struck off by the mint, which I had admired when my Master brought them into the workshop one day. I remembered that incident, because when Hugh had shown the pennies to Arnaud, saying there was a new and striking effigy of the King on them, he had added, "What a beautiful color new copper is—much richer than gold. This copper-red is the most gorgeous shade in the world for a woman's hair, I think."

Now, here was a woman with hair of that color, and her big, dark-gray eyes and her white skin seemed to make it glitter more dazzlingly. She was young, too—as young as the morning, and her face was pearly in the gleaming dawn. If she thought me wonderful, I thought her wonderful, too—the sweet, slender creature, so vivid and full of eager life, beside that tired-looking, gray-haired father of hers, who took no interest in me.

"It's just as my father says, I don't know anything about autos," the girl went on. "But then, why shouldn't I want to know? I don't know anything

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about Europe yet, because we only landed in Liverpool yesterday from New York, and came right over here; but there's nothing about it I don't mean to know, and father thinks I'm all right about that, so why not about automobiles—and everything else in the world that's worth knowing about?"

"Why not, indeed?" asked my Master, smiling as he looked at the beautiful young girl, glowing like a rose now in her eagerness to find out everything in life. "But you don't seem to have cared to know much about my country."

"Your country?" echoed the girl.

"Not exactly mine, for I'm Scotch—a 'wild Highlander'—but being British, perhaps I have a right to call England my country, too."

"And you think we don't care about it, because we didn't stop, I suppose; but that was because we care so much. We wanted to see England at its loveliest, and I've always heard that was in the spring. Dad couldn't start last spring: he's only come at all to please me, because he thinks he's too busy to amuse himself; but he's awfully good about doing things to please me, so he's promised to take me all over France and Germany and Austria, then Italy when it gets cold; perhaps Spain and a little of the East, and, at last, all May and June in England before we sail for home. You see, we saved the best for the last."

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"I see. You are quite right," said my Master. But he was admiring her so much that he would probably have thought she was quite right to spend the summer at the North Pole—a place I'd often heard him mention, apparently with some disparagement.

"I think we are keeping this gentleman from starting," said the beauty's tired-looking father. "We had better go now, Lia. I expect those officials will be about their business by this time."

My Master hurried to explain that they were not keeping him, because his mechanic had gone to see about the car's papers. He was sure to be away a long time, as custom house officers were always slow in measuring their red tape. "It is so very kind of you both to talk to me," he added. And he said it so pleasantly that I could see the old gentleman visibly thawing. He began to brighten up, and I thought that perhaps he wasn't so old, after all, but had tried to crowd about five years' work into each single year of his life, which gave him that tired look. When he heard that Hugh was waiting for something that had to do with officialdom, he said that his daughter had lost some of their luggage, or, rather, it could not be found when they had landed from the passenger-boat a few hours earlier.

"We were advised to go to bed at a hotel near the quay, and come back the first thing in the morning

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to see if anything had been learned about it," he went on. "Well, it's the first thing in the morning now, and here we are; but not a soul who knows anything about the matter of the missing hat-box has turned up yet. I tell you we do things differently over my side of the water, and I was prepared to find France pretty lively and up to date, but this doesn't look like it, does it, sir?"

My Master was very sympathetic—more than he would have been if the hat-box had been the father's instead of the daughter's. He offered to help, as the old gentleman and the girl confessed to knowing hardly any French—"except book French"—and finally to my pleasure as well as his it was settled that they should stop until Arnaud came back. Then Hugh would see the father and daughter through their difficulties; and as they would not be far off, and might come back at any moment, I didn't think that Arnaud would have time to play any tricks with me.

Soon they were all three as friendly as if they had known one another for days; and when they had told each other their names—the old man and the girl were Murrays, and claimed Scotch ancestry, which pleased my Master—Miss Cecilia began asking more questions about me. She thought Champion a splendid name, "just right" for such a noble car, as well as prophetic; and she was astonished when she was told that I was

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the first of my kind, that no hands had touched me in the making of any important parts, except those of my Master and one other man, his employee.

"If I won the race," said Hugh, "I should become the father of many cars, built from the same designs."

"And do you think Champion will win?" asked the girl.

"Barring accidents, I don't see that we need fear anything else," answered Hugh.

Ah! that was it, "barring accidents." What was Arnaud doing? I wondered. Was it only the business of my papers that kept him away so long?

"I shall be thinking about you—and Champion—all day to-morrow," said Cecilia. "So will Dad. It's like knowing a horse before a race. I'm a Kentucky girl—at least, I was born there, and we didn't come to live in New York until I was twelve. Maybe you know, in Kentucky we think a lot of horses and sport of all kinds. And once I was allowed to ride a famous horse only two or three days before he won a big race. I shall never forget how I felt—and how glad I was when my horse won."

"How I wish I could give you a spin on Champion!" said Hugh. "Then perhaps you would feel something like that if we bring it off in the great race."

"Oh, I would give anything in the world to do it—just anything in the world!" the girl whispered.

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"Well, then, why shouldn't you?" exclaimed my Master. "Would you let me take her, Mr. Murray?"

"She's never been on an automobile," hesitated the tired-looking gentleman, "and I don't know that I'm very anxious to have her go."

"Oh, but Dad, if it would make me happier than anything else possibly could?—and you brought me to Europe to make me happy!" cried Miss Cecilia.

"I'll tell you what we might do. It would be a splendid plan," said Hugh eagerly. "We could send Arnaud into the town to hire another car—not a racer, of course—and he could drive it to Paris with you and the luggage, Mr. Murray, keeping close to me, while I drove Miss Murray on Champion. Would you consent to that?"

"I'm afraid that really——" began Mr. Murray; but his daughter cut him short.

"Oh, Dad, you can't refuse such a chance for me, to have the time of my life!" she coaxed, at the same time slipping her hand through her father's arm. I'm sure if she had tried in that way to steer me up a hill of one in two, or a flight of stairs as steep as a ladder, I should have gone without a sigh from my silencer; and the tired gentleman was too tired to resist long. He objected, and argued, but she cooed him down, and presently it was settled to the satisfaction of three in the party—counting me—that the beautiful Miss Mur-



"HE OBJECTED, AND ARGUED, BUT SHE COOED HIM DOWN."

(p. 82.)

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ray should be Hugh's companion and mine on the way to Paris, instead of going there by train as she had expected to do.

This was just decided, when Arnaud appeared with the papers, apologizing glibly for the delay, and casting a furtive eye on the strangers, though he was too well trained to show surprise that his master should have picked up friends. He could not keep his features under the same control, though, when he heard the plan for the day. His face fell, and for an instant there was such an odd, hunted look in his eyes that I felt there was more in his chagrin than mere disgust at being told off to drive an unknown old gentleman in a common, hired car.

"Something was arranged to happen on the journey," I said to myself gloomily, "something that he doesn't know how he is going to rearrange now. What was it?"

CHAPTER VI.

I Come to Paris.

If Arnaud had been planning any treachery for the journey to Paris, there was danger that, when he went in search of another car, he might find an opportunity of rearranging his plot to suit altered circumstances.

I had not an easy moment until he came back, driving a mincing piece of affectation, which, I suppose, called itself an automobile. It was all red paint and brass, and fussy little fringes on a kind of canopy, but Arnaud said it was the best he could do at short notice, as all the finest and most modern cars at the Dieppe garages were out or engaged, and they would not let even this one go to Paris without a chauffeur from the place where it was hired.

Arnaud was the picture of sullen discontent, and I chuckled in my bonnet, for I thought that his silent rage was too deep for mere vexation at losing a ride on me, or even being obliged to conduct strangers in a bad car. "Perhaps he tried to find the enemy to tell him of the changed plan, and failed to come across him," I said to myself, beginning to cheer up.

It was better than a bath of oil when your engine was overheated to see the pleasure of that beautiful

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girl at the prospect of a spin with me; and, besides, the conceit of the little superannuated red automobile would have made a cracked cylinder rattle with laughter. The poor thing actually thought itself superior to me, and put on the airs of a languishing beauty, telling me about its successes in the past. Some racers would have snubbed it, but I thank my sparks my Master must have cast a little of his own sense of humor in my metal; therefore, I was highly amused at the ignorance of the poor little wretch, and then it was my first chance to exchange ideas with any creature of my own kind.

Poor Reddy thought I was ugly because I was of English make, and sniffed out its opinion that women and automobiles from across the Channel had no style. "Now, I am so attractive with my nice bright paint and smart cushions, and brass, and my clean white fringe that my people can easily get four louis a day for letting me out," the creature whiffled, as she stood by my side while they loaded her up with luggage from the hotel, and luggage retrieved from some mysterious hiding-place on the quay. "How much do your people get for you? I shouldn't say much, for, if you'll excuse me, I never saw anything quite so *outré* as the shape of your body, and your color is rather forbidding, to say nothing of your having only two seats, which scarcely deserve the name,"

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"My Master never lets me, and I don't think he would," I said quietly, at which little Reddy chuckled rudely.

"Say 'could' instead of 'would,' and you'd be nearer the mark, my poor, plain friend," said she smartly. But I was almost sorry for the little horror presently, when Miss Murray laughed at her fringe, and exclaimed that she looked like a doll's house on wheels. I was glad, too, that I hadn't made any unchivalrous retort, when I saw the expression on poor Reddy's bonnet as I started, and left her limping far behind.

Off I flew, like an arrow compared to her little pottering power, and my Master had to be constantly slowing down, otherwise we should not have seen Mr. Murray, Arnaud, and Reddy again until they had crawled after us to Paris. I kept wishing that this very thing might happen, and did my best to bring it about; but my Master wouldn't give me my head, much as he would—I'm sure—have liked doing it. I know now, with all my experience of the world, and its funny, conventional ideas, which it takes so seriously, that girls are never allowed to go off alone with young men for any length of time unless they are relations, or have agreed to be married; but I was blissfully ignorant of such nonsense then, and I thought it very silly of the old gentleman to spoil his daughter's day by keeping her under his eye, and me

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at almost a walking pace of twenty miles or so an hour. Indeed, I was even tempted once or twice to criticize my Master, and think him wrong to humor the girl's father.

She often looked back over her shoulder to see how Reddy and Reddy's passenger were getting on, or to wave her hand; and then she would pay some compliment to me—not as if she wanted to be flattering, but as if she was so happy that she couldn't help saying kind things.

After we had been traveling for some time, and she had told anecdotes about herself and her past life to Hugh, and Hugh had told things about himself and his pretty sister, Sheila, to her, she broke out suddenly:

"I wonder if you'd think me very bold and officious if I said something odd to you?"

I had been enjoying the scenery for a few minutes, and hardly listening to the conversation, but her change of tone was so abrupt that I pricked up my valves and stopped trying to count apple-trees in the orchards through which we passed.

"I couldn't think you bold or officious," answered my Master. "I'm not so stupid as all that, you know, though I ain a Britisher."

They both laughed at this, for they had been chaffing each other about their rival countries; but the girl still hesitated,

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"I haven't any right to say what I want to," she went on. "Maybe it will offend you?"

"I promise you it won't," returned Hugh, who always said exactly the kind of thing I wanted him to say, as I had often thought before. "You couldn't want to say anything which would offend me. If it's about Champion——"

"Oh, I should only have praise for Champion, if I talked all day and half the night," laughed the girl. "It's about Champion's chauffeur. I don't like his face, Mr. Cameron, and I hate to think you trust him so much. I watched the man, and he never once met your eye when he spoke to you. There's something queer about his manner, too. I suppose he isn't mad, is he?"

"Not he," said Hugh, "he's only tired out with hard work and many vigils; and his Latin blood is boiling with excitement about the race. He'll probably collapse after it's all over, but I don't believe he'll fail me while I need his help; he never has yet."

"Don't trust too much to his help," said the girl. "Think of all you've told me about this race—how it means everything to you for your future. What if your man has been bought by those who would like to steal your invention?"

"It's angelic of you to take an interest," exclaimed Hugh. "But I think you misjudge Arnaud. If I

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win the ten thousand pound prize, he knows I mean to give him a clear thousand; so he's likely to keep straight for mercenary motives, if not for loyalty. He's confided to me that he is in love with a country-woman of his own—some pretty French girl—who's singing at a music-hall in London. It's quite a romance, I believe, for it seems the girl's rather a swell in her way—handsome, and a great favorite with the music-hall public—of which I'm not one, so I've never heard or seen her. Arnaud used to go, when he could get off—after I brought him to England to work for me—every night to all the music-halls where she sang some song that had made a hit. Then he began sending her presents, and writing letters of the humblest adoration, but at first she paid not the slightest attention to her lowly admirer. At last, however, when he had given up hope of receiving any word or sign from her—though apparently she kept his offerings!—she answered, and invited him to call.

“That was the beginning of the acquaintance, and now Arnaud is in the seventh heaven of incredulous delight because his divinity has vaguely encouraged him to hope, if he can make money enough to support a wife as she ought to be supported. All this he told me only last night; so you see a great deal is hanging in the balance for the man as well as the master. And if you have the kindness for a love-affair that young

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ladies are said to have, perhaps this little story will have softened your heart to poor Arnaud?"

"I'm not sure it hasn't worried me more," said the girl. "He doesn't look the sort of a man a singer of that sort would commit an imprudence for. He isn't a bit handsome or dashing."

"Yet, apparently, he made an impression."

"Apparently. But how? You say the woman wouldn't have anything to do with him at first. "Why did she suddenly change her mind?"

"I thought that was a woman's privilege."

"So it is, when she has a good reason. But I don't see that Arnaud is a good reason. He has a common face."

"Clever."

"Would that appeal to such a girl? I wonder if he ever talked to her about your car?"

"He would probably have bored her to death if he had. Women only care to talk about their own motor-cars."

"Am I not talking to you—and caring to talk—about your Champion?"

"Ah, but you're an exception. I never met any girl at all like you."

"Did you never know any other American ones?"

"Never."

"Perhaps, if you had, you'd think we were all alike,"

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"Oh, no, I shouldn't."

"How can you tell?"

"I have a conviction that if I searched America I shouldn't be able to find another like you."

"You won't trust my conviction; why should you trust your own, which is only a man's? Women have a sort of corner in such things."

"Well, I have a secondary conviction, which is, that you'd not be so hard on Arnaud if he were a handsome fellow."

"How unkind you are! But promise me you won't let him drive Champion in the race."

"I'll promise that with pleasure." He didn't belittle his promise by explaining that he'd never meant Arnaud to drive.

"And that you won't once leave him alone with your car till after the race is safely over."

"I'll promise that, too." I squeaked a little with joy when I heard this; for if Hugh hadn't wished to please Miss Cecilia Murray he would have been very likely to give me unsuspectingly into Arnaud's charge for the night. Now, thanks to her extraordinary intuition and sympathetic interest in my success, one danger that I myself had no power to ward off was averted.

Hardly had my Master given his word, which pledged him to remain continually at my side until our

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fate was decided, when a loud tooting of Reddy's bronchitic little horn caused him to slow down, and then to run back.

That was because Reddy had stopped, I soon learned from a few words which passed between my Master and Miss Cecilia—or "Lia," as she was called by her father. Arnaud shouted that something was wrong, and then, leaving Reddy's chauffeur to tinker sulkily at her inner workings, he came to my side, beginning to jabber very fast in French. He had been driving without the slightest difficulty, he said, though the chauffeur pretended that he did not thoroughly understand the car, and the breakdown was clearly not his fault. But the other man had the vanity of a monkey, and was ready to attribute all the trouble to him. The chauffeur—silly fellow—vowed that if he were allowed to drive he could keep up with the racer, without damaging his car. Now, would the Honorable Monsieur Cameron allow him—Arnaud—to forge ahead of Champion and keep ahead, if even for a short time, just to prove to the conceited idiot that if any speed could be got out of the little old automobile, Jean Arnaud could do it as well, if not better, than one who was used to driving her every day?

"Oh, certainly, I'll let you have a fair start, and show what you can do," laughed my Master, "But make the chap hurry up, won't you?"

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"He will be ready in a minute, unless he is a fool," said Arnaud. "It's the pump that was not working properly, and so I told him, though he wouldn't believe it till he had seen for himself."

The Frenchman ran off, and I expected a little conversation to follow with Mr. Murray; but his daughter told Hugh to look back and see how eagerly her father was watching the progress of repairs. "He's interested in automobiles already, in spite of himself," she said. "That's a good thing, for after this day's glorious experience I sha'n't give him any peace till he buys one for us to tour about in. But tell me, why did your chauffeur call you the 'Honorable Monsieur Cameron'? Is that just his way of speaking, or have you a title or something?"

"Not a bit of it," said Hugh hastily. "It's only a silly sort of courtesy handle, all nonsense, you know; but Arnaud is a bit of a snob, and has a womanlike idea that it will impress people."

"But just what does it mean, anyhow?" asked Miss Cecilia. "In my country, when people are 'Honorable,' they're either judges, or senators, or congressmen, or public sort of characters."

"Nothing so grand about me," said Hugh. "The 'Honorable' comes to me whether I like it or not, on account of my father."

"You might gratify my curiosity and explain."

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"You see, he's a parson."

"Does that make his son an 'Honorable'? What a funny British custom."

"It ought to, but it doesn't. However, the real way is just as funny, I dare say; it depends on how you look at it. He happens also to be a viscount, so as that isn't high enough up in the peerage to give his children titles, they have handles instead. Isn't it silly?"

"I think it's rather fun. I should be quite proud of it, if I were you," said Lia.

"I'm not, a bit. A man ought to be rich to live up to that sort of thing, whereas I—well, I've spent every penny I have in the world making this blessed car. If I fail in the race I shall be blotted out. I practically sha'n't exist. If I win, why, Champion and I will loom big in the eyes of Europe for a day or two—quite long enough for the starting of a big syndicate for the manufacturing of other motors with all Champion's peculiarities and virtues. That's what I've been working for; and most of the prize—if I get it—will go into that company. I shall have my invention patented immediately after the race, and all will be well."

"Why didn't you have it patented before? I never heard of such a reckless thing."

"It isn't as reckless as it sounds." And then he went on to explain, as he had to Sheila, that there was a

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man—an enemy of his—who might have got access to his secret from the diagrams, and rushed in an idea of his own before Hugh's business could have been completed. "Once I've won this race, the whole world will know what Champion is," he went on, "and no one can lay claim to having had the idea before me."

"Well, don't trust your Arnaud too far," Lia reiterated, and just then the little red car shot by us, Mr. Murray taking off his traveling-cap to wave, and looking quite excited behind his eyeglasses.

We were close to a little place named Forges les Eaux, it seemed, when this happened, and my Master pleased Arnaud and the strange chauffeur by trailing meekly at Reddy's heels as we passed through the market-place of the town, out again into open country. Suddenly, as we were trotting slowly along, humoring Reddy, Arnaud put on his best speed, and the scarlet car, surprised at its own wild pace, jumped ahead at something like thirty miles an hour—more than it could keep up, over the first stretch of rising ground.

"Hello!" I said to myself. "So this was Arnaud's game. It means something queer, there's no doubt, and I must have been dreaming not to have suspected it before."

My impulse was to spring forward, overtake Reddy, and see what Arnaud was about, but my Master had no such anxiety. He was delighted to have the girl

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comfortably to himself, I guessed, with her father far in front, instead of following close behind, so he held me back instead of letting me rush on according to my will. Even the girl had no suspicion, and the two talked and laughed, while it was a wonder my carburation did not go wrong in my impatience.

When we did come in sight of Reddy again, she had slackened speed for a hill, up which she was toiling painfully; and when Hugh, laughing, called out to Arnaud that really he should have to pass him now, Arnaud answered, "Pass, Monsieur, and welcome. I have made my little effect, thank you. All is well."

His voice sounded quite cheerful, and I was sure that his words had a double meaning. He had made "little effect," and "all was well." What, then, had happened at this spot which Arnaud had desired to reach before us?

"We've just seen such a fine automobile," said Mr. Murray, as we passed him on the hill, "a bit like yours in shape, so I suppose it must have been another racer. If you hurry you can see it still, maybe, when you get to the top of the hill beyond."

We did hurry, though I don't think it occurred to my Master that the presence of the "fine automobile" had any connection with us.

What we did see, however, was only a far, gray cloud of dust in the distance, which effectually hid

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whatever object it might contain; and Hugh had too much consideration for Mr. Murray's feelings as a father to quicken his pace and overtake the thing, even had he been moved by curiosity to do so.

We almost stopped at the top of the hill, and waited politely for Reddy to come up with us again.

"Your chauffeur was acquainted with the men in that other car," said Mr. Murray. "I don't know if they had had an accident, but, anyhow, they were stationary in the little cross-road with the poplars, which you must have noticed just before the hill; and your chauffeur called out something to them in French. With that, they made off as if the fiend was after them. I can't get him to understand my English, so do ask him to explain what happened. My curiosity was aroused, especially as the other chauffeur, who speaks English very well, insists that your man didn't call out in French, because he couldn't understand a word that was said."

My Master looked surprised to hear that Arnaud's English had suddenly failed in such an emergency, for he knew even better than I did, perhaps, that when Arnaud chose he could speak English quite respectably, if not fluently, and understand any ordinary conversation, too. But then, possibly, Mr. Murray's American pronunciation and accent might have made some difference with ears not accustomed to it.

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"Who were the men in the automobile you saw, Arnaud?" asked Hugh in French, more to please Mr. Murray, I think, than because he cared to know.

"They were strangers to me, sir," replied Arnaud. "I but asked them if anything was the matter, or if they needed help, and they answered that they were all right now, thanked me, and passed on, taking the road to Paris. They, perhaps, started from Dieppe before us, and were *en panne* at this place for some time. Probably we shall see them again on the day of the race."

"There was no other car on our boat when we crossed last night," said my Master.

"No, Monsieur; but I heard that a number of men with their motors had come over by the previous boat, and spent the night at Dieppe, starting again at dawn."

"Were the men in the car Frenchmen?" went on Hugh.

"They looked Spanish, and I addressed them in that language, which I speak only indifferently well; but it proved that I was right, for they replied in the same tongue."

Hugh translated the conversation for the benefit of Mr. Murray, whose curiosity was at last satisfied; but not so mine. I remembered very well that Sheila had asked her brother if he thought Gilbert Barr-Simons were a Spaniard, and I wished that he might remem-

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ber, too; but he showed no sign of so much as recalling Barr-Simons' existence.

I knew now why Arnaud had wanted an excuse to be in front of us at this particular part of the road, but I wanted to know more. I wanted to know what Arnaud had really said in Spanish.

As for explaining that he had fancied the men might be Spaniards, and tried that language on the chance, it seemed to me all nonsense; for how could he tell whether they might not be of some other southern nation? I didn't believe that Spaniards could be told at a glance from Italians, or even Frenchmen; but then, my suspicions were on the alert, owing to what I already knew of Arnaud; and perhaps it was not unnatural that my Master and the others let the statement pass unchallenged.

Had I been able to choose my own pace, only shown my way by my Master's hand on the steering-wheel, I should have done the whole journey in a few hours; but suiting my steps to puffy little Reddy's, and stopping a long time for lunch, it was nearly evening when we reached the outskirts of a great city, and Hugh cried "Paris!"

There was no sound of relief in his voice though, rather the contrary, and I guessed why, for I felt somewhat as he did. It seemed to me that, though the world was a very good world, and a fine place to run

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about in, it would never be as gay again if we were to lose sight of a pair of big, gray eyes, and a crown of waving hair with a copper glint upon it. But we were not to lose them—not yet, in any case—for Lia said to Hugh, as we drove into Paris, that she had made up her mind to be present at the great race. “Dad thought of stopping quietly in Paris for a while,” she said, “but I’ll get him to take me wherever the race is going to be, and then come back to Paris later.”

“Perhaps he won’t consent; he doesn’t care much about motors,” said Hugh, quite anxiously.

“Not consent!” repeated the girl. “To something *I* want? Why, what do we American girls bring their fathers up for? He mayn’t care much about motors—just yet; but he cares whole bushel-basketfuls for me. And I’m going to see that race!”

“I’ll look for you,” said my Master. “And afterward? I’m not going to lose you afterward, am I?”

“Oh, afterward! Who knows about the afterward!” And Lia laughed, as if she enjoyed teasing him a little.

When the “afterward” came, I thought about those words of hers, and they rang through my cylinders sometimes, so that I could hear nothing else for the echoing sound of them; nothing else but beautiful Lia Murray laughing, and saying: “Who knows about the ‘afterward’?”

CHAPTER VII.

I Start to Win the Cup.

My Master kept his word to Lia, and slept on the floor beside me, in a private garage he had hired. Next morning, early, I was taken out and driven away from Paris again. But before we left the great, gay city we stopped under the windows of a big hotel, and my Master made a little music with my siren. That must have been a signal agreed upon, for though it was so early that the best shops were all fast asleep still, one of the windows flew open, and Lia Murray leaned out. She was dressed in white and wore no hat to cover her copper hair, so she looked prettier than ever.

The window wasn't very high up, and she called down: "The best of luck for to-morrow! And Dad and I are coming."

My Master's cap was off, and he waved it once to her. Then I was whirled round a corner, rather disappointed, for I had hoped that my Master would drop Arnaud and take Lia with us again, as he had yesterday. But I have learned since that the pleasantest things are not likely to happen twice in succession.

We ran out of Paris, through endless green country

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—fair, young green, sprinkled with blossoms, pink and white—to a distant town many kilometers south of the capital, which was to be the starting-point for the Vandervorst Cup Race. There I was put into another private garage, which I had all to myself, except for my Master. I heard Arnaud offer to stop with me through the night and relieve Hugh, but the promise to Lia was in the way, and though Arnaud urged, and almost insisted, seeming so hurt that I know Hugh hated to refuse, still my Master would not yield. That made me very hopeful, and I told myself that the danger, whatever it had been, was over now; for was not Hugh going to drive me to-morrow, and, if he did, who and what could prevent us from winning?

Arnaud stayed late talking to our Master, and appeared again long before it was light, looking haggard and red-eyed, as if he had not slept much. It was only two o'clock, and black as a pocket, but evidently we were to start early, for they began at once to look me over, examining all my parts hastily yet thoroughly. As they oiled and rubbed me, filling me up with life-giving petrol, they talked in tones which tried not to be excited.

I listened with eager interest as they discussed the great circuit which had been marked out for the race, a circuit where all the competing cars were to go

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round three times, beginning soon after dawn, in an order to be determined by the drawing of lots.

The cars were to be started at intervals of five minutes, and there would be certain halting-places called controls, where times were to be taken and fresh fuel could be supplied. But I had not heard half what I wanted to hear before I was driven off to the starting-point; and once on the road my Master and Arnaud fell into silence, as if they were afraid of betraying some emotion to each other if they talked.

I had thought that I was beginning by this time to know a good deal of the great world and its phases, but now I realized all in a moment that real life had been a closed book for me. It was only on this day—with the gray, early dawn of this day—that it had indeed opened for me, and opened at a page full of wonderful knowledge. What would happen for my Master when the page had turned over? Ah! that was a question that sent the petrol throbbing to my carbureter.

Hundreds, thousands of other people besides Hugh Cameron were thinking of this race, and nothing but this race, to-day.

Along both sides of a broad, straight road stretched a vast encampment, like a dream army in the dim, illusive light.

Grand stands, draped with flags, were already be-

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ginning to fill with groups of people, women as well as men. More motor-cars than I could count were drawn up on the dusty grass along the straight, white line of the road; red, gray, blue, green, and yellow motor-cars, covered and uncovered, very grand new ones, small battered old ones. Wooden pavilions for refreshment, with banners waving, and big boards displayed, advertising the list of their specialties, towered above the rows of canvas tents; and here and there were odd little erections which later I discovered were offices for telegraphing the news of the race. Among the tents and the pavilions so closely ranged together flowed a continuous stream of dark figures, aimless, apparently, as the swarms of ants I had seen in the country when we rested to lunch or to renew water or petrol; yet each separate form had its object and interest.

As for me, I was naturally more intent upon the competing motors—my rivals—than upon any other center of the extraordinary scene. I was driven near to them, and I was astonished at the difference in their principal features, the difference not only between them and the touring cars drawn up as spectators at a respectful distance, but at the way in which the competitors differed from one another. Often you would hardly have supposed they belonged to the same breed.

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I knew from all I had heard that the Vandervoorst Cup had been offered especially to encourage inventors, and give an opportunity for the exhibition of rival ideas in automobile construction, but many of the creators seemed to have gone out of their way to make their cars look as fantastic as possible, perhaps in the hope of drawing public attention to them, and thus securing an advertisement.

As we glided by a nest of grotesque horrors, gaunt and gray in the dawn, as skeletons of misshapen giants, I thanked my Master that he had not been minded to fashion me in a shape resembling any of these. There were other monstrosities, too, less suggestive of terrific force, things that tempted to sardonic laughter; but I did not laugh. As I took up my final position under a tree bearing a large, white label marked with the same number my Master had fastened on me—like a big medal—I wondered which, if any, of these silent, waiting monsters would run me closest—perhaps even conquer me! But no, I would not even think of defeat. To regard it as a possibility was an insult to my Master's skill, and his confidence in my power.

I kept cool, without a throb of the valves, in the midst of the babel of voices talking many tongues. Quietly, as if I had no feeling, I watched the busy coming and going of owners and chauffeurs, pouring

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gurgling petrol out of tins, oiling their strange brood from long-nosed cans, tightening up nuts and bolts, and giving last anxious touches to their darlings.

The leaden gray of the first dawn was brightening to pale silver, but still it was not full day; and now and then the weirdness of the scene was heightened singularly by a brilliant blue light that would suddenly break over the sky, dimming the ethereal hint of coming sunrise, and throwing sharp, black shadows on the pale faces of the eager crowd. I wondered if this could be a queer kind of French electrical storm, and was glad when I heard my Master say something to Arnaud about the odd effect of magnesium-lights used by the photographers who snap-shotted the scene for publication in illustrated papers.

There were journalists, too, among the throng—journalists of all nations—taking notes about the different cars for articles they were going to write or telegraph. Two of these, with books and pencils in their hands, stopped to have a look at me, as a great many other people had, since we arrived under the white-labeled tree.

“Well, I never could have imagined such a lot of freak autos,” said one to the other in English, but not English-sounding English; “and this one takes the cake. A regular demon! Just look at this wild and weird fan thing on his nose.” (I was wearing my

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aerial screw on this great morning, of course.) "What the dickens can it be for?" And the rude fellow had the impudence to tap me with his stylographic pen; but he stopped when Hugh gave him a glance—not a frown—but the sort of glance which made my Master seem a king looking at a smirking clown.

That offended the creature, I suppose, for as he turned away, pretending to take no further interest in me, he said in quite a loud voice to his friend: "Everybody's saying that Barr-Simons is certain to win with a wonderful new car he's been making, and keeping up his sleeve."

Barr-Simons indeed! I hated the man already because of what my Master had said of him; now I hated him more than ever for his boasting—for he must have been boasting to these newspaper people; and I determined that I would put out every ounce of strength I possessed to pass him, if he and his car came near us on the road.

At last, above all the clamor of voices and the mingling throb of many motors, there soared lightly the clear notes of a bugle, and immediately after a body of soldiers came marching briskly by in red trousers and overcoats. It was their duty to form a living hedge to keep back the spectators from the course, and they took up positions in a far-reaching line, clearing the road and pressing back without mercy the ex-

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cited spectators who surged round us, to wonder at our appearance and speculate on our points.

Now the moment had come; the moment for which I was born. I stood there stripped to my bones, so to speak, not carrying a superfluous ounce of weight. My Master, masked and goggled, was seated on me, with his firm hand on the steering-wheel. He it was who had given me my last oiling, because I had squeaked a shrill warning when Arnaud had neglected to fill a grease-cap in one of my wheel-bearings. All was done. We were ready, Arnaud crouched at our Master's feet, to lessen that terrible wind-pressure which my propeller was made to overcome. I thought that I could feel his heart thump, thump; and I knew that fits of shivering passed over him, as a breeze rustles the leaves of the poplar-tree.

Almost everybody else seemed to have some one specially interested in him. Many of the drivers had friends who ran up to shake them by the hand at the last minute; owners whispered words of counsel into the ears of chauffeurs who were to guide their inventions to success or failure; dainty ladies, charmingly dressed, early as was the hour, picked their way among the machines to smile at husbands, brothers, or lovers who were to drive for the honor of some famous manufacturing house. But not a soul had my Master to wish him "bon voyage," or so it seemed

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at first. Just at the last, however, as the sun rose above the horizon and sent a wave of gold over the landscape, the sudden radiance lit up three familiar faces, and I could have snorted with joy at sight of two of them.

One was the beautiful face of Cecilia Murray, who was with her father, but had arrived just too late to speak with Hugh before the start. There she was, however, true to her word, as we might have known such a girl would be; and at some distance behind her, too timid to come forward, was my Master's pretty sister, Sheila Cameron.

She was with a lady, still quite young, but evidently a good deal older than Sheila, and more a woman of the world. Her face, which might have been very handsome in girlhood, had rather a worn, disappointed expression, and the searching light of early morning showed that her color was not genuine, like the flower-flush on Sheila's cheeks, or Lia Murray's.

Sheila was prettily, if plainly dressed, but her companion was as wonderfully arrayed as any of the brilliant beings I had noticed in the streets of Paris. Her blond hair was puffed out under a lace hat and arranged as elaborately as Mademoiselle 'Toinette's had been, and she wore a good deal of jewelry; but I was glad to see that, though Cecilia Murray had no jewelry at all, her costume was quite as Parisian and

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elegant as that of Sheila's companion. It would be difficult for any woman to surpass her, either in looks or toilet, I reflected as proudly as if she were my property, or my Master's.

The light on their faces and hair made them gleam like gilded angels on a cupola, and my Master, who had been hoping to see Lia, perhaps, caught sight of her with delight, and of his sister with joyful surprise. Whether he knew her friend or not, I could not tell, but I have a good memory for anything that interests me, and putting two and two together, I imagined that Sheila must have come to France with Mrs. Barr-Simons, the "Edith" my Master's father had once wanted him to marry.

He lifted his cap, and both Lia and Sheila waved, recognizing him in spite of his goggles. They would have come nearer if they could—at least it was evident that the Murrays tried, while probably Mrs. Barr-Simons would not have cared to wish her husband's rival, Hugh Cameron, good-speed; but it was too late, for the cars were starting, and everybody who had a seat in the grand stand made a rush in that direction.

My Master started me gently by turning on the switch, and I was purring to myself, my fears of Arnaud's treachery at last forgotten; for what could he do now, with Hugh at the helm, and every part of me in splendid fighting trim?

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I knew that I was working with magnificent rhythm, and I tried to communicate with my Master by thrumming out his favorite air and mine, "The March of the Cameron Men"; but I'm afraid that he did not realize what I was doing. Nevertheless, even if I were not a musical genius, I was proud of myself, proud of my terrific strength and velvet suppleness. Still, I was not conceited, for it was the wonder of my Master's art which impressed me—the art which could create a machine like myself, surpassing the wind in swiftness, yet obedient to the lightest touch on throttle or accelerator.

I began to advance slowly behind the five other cars which were timed to start before me, and my wonderful propeller was modestly folded up as I waited my turn. The others, whose liberty to dash ahead without delay I envied, were being sent off at five minutes' intervals by the waving of a white flag in the hand of the official starter.

Nearer and nearer came my turn. Now, I was only three from the starting-point.

It was broad daylight, with clouds that raced across the sky in rivalry to us; and in the grand stand that rose tier above tier I could see rows of heads, with eager eyes gazing at us through gleaming field-glasses. In the central box, lined with crimson, stood the President of the French Republic, whom I recognized

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from a large photograph Arnaud had pinned up in our old workshop at home, and on his right hand was a visiting monarch, a keen enthusiast for the sport of motoring. There were other men in the box behind these two great personages, but there was one by their side—on the President's left—who was more interesting to me than the two rulers. Lucky for me that I had seen his portrait and grown familiar with the features, otherwise I should have remained in dull ignorance; for though they must have been thinking intently of many things, neither my Master nor Arnaud spoke a word. But I knew that it was no other than Vandervoorst himself, the famous young newspaper proprietor who was offering the cup.

Only one more car to go now, and then I—I could leap ahead for my Master's honor and my own glory. Time after time a great "Who-o-o!" of wonder and excitement has risen from the crowd as a monster hurled itself forward, and with a buzzing as of ten million bees vanished into a cloud of dust.

The flag waved, and away rushed the gray dragon in front, his gearing giving forth a high, singing scream as he sprang off down the course.

I moved up to the official with the flag, who stood with his arm raised, and his cold eyes fixed, not on me, but on a chronometer.

My piston-beats kept time with its ticking. I counted

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each second as it dropped into the past. Why did my Master not unfold my propeller? I wondered. How could he expect me to astonish the world as he meant me to astonish it, if, like others, I had to fight with the detaining hands of the air pressing me back, refusing to give way save when my desperate strength flung them off, and left them clawing hopelessly at my sides as I ran between? Suddenly, however, he pressed the little lever that actuated my aerial screw, and bade me turn my superfluous energy to driving it, as I would have begged him to do if I could have spoken. Joyously I set the propeller revolving with the speed which the wind boasted. I seemed to stand in a tunnel-like vacuum, down which my wild impulse was to rush with the breath of fire itself.

A ringing shout went up from the spectators in the stands when they saw this astonishing new thing, an automobile calling to its aid its arch enemy, the air. The white flag fell like a great flower-petal. Now—now—at last—with life as the stake!

The faithful clutch expanded its rings within my fly-wheel, and I accepted its embrace with rapture. So swiftly, so vehemently did I dash down the tunnel-vacuum, that in a piston-beat all the hubbub and the wild cheers had died into silence, as if behind a shut door, and we were far away on the long, white road.

CHAPTER VIII.

I Do What I Can.

As I drank the air which strove in vain to conquer me, I was no longer a machine made by man; I was a throbbing embodiment of man's genius, doing what man could not do. I was matter informed by mind—the mind of my beloved Master. Existence was flight; and flight was an ecstasy made up of strength and speed.

Before me I saw a moving pillar of dust, and knew it hid the car sent off by the white flag five minutes before me. Five full minutes' start had it had, but I was gaining on it more and more with every second.

Suddenly the great white cloud flashed round a curve between our road and another, a bend like that of a hook or a woman's hairpin. A moment later, and we were at the same place, I tearing on at my maddest speed. To round the bend at that pace was impossible. Instinctively I felt that centrifugal force would hurl me from the track, that my wheels would not bear the violent wrench of such a sudden change in direction. I could not have stopped myself, even to save my dear Master's life and honor. I believed that the end had come; that instead of winning the

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race for him, in a second more I should have killed him and Arnaud and dashed myself to pieces.

But I had reckoned without his experience and presence of mind. I might have known that he would not let me come to grief at the first or any other turning. We were close upon the terrible curve when the clutch relaxed its iron grip on my fly-wheel, my motor's wild tendency to race was benignly checked by the governor, ever on the alert to prevent me from straining my mechanism; then, with a sudden twist of the steering-wheel, we were safely round the bend and flying on again at full speed, as if there had been no check.

I purred my triumph at the exquisite piece of steering and judgment; and to the spectators who lined this dangerous bit of road, no doubt with the morbid hope of seeing some terrible accident, it must have seemed the work of magic; for the slight slackening of speed would hardly have been visible to an onlooker.

A sigh of relief—or was it disappointment?—whistled from five hundred throats as we shot past—a tribute wrung from humanity in spite of itself; and I gloried anew in my Master.

Once round the corner we gained faster than ever on the car in advance, which was making such a brave fight that I was sorry to humiliate it; but I had my

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Master's fortune to think of, and this was no time for sentiment, so I ran my best.

The lilting of our siren, worked by Arnaud, attracted the attention of the chauffeur in front; for he spoke to his master, and reluctantly the car swerved a little, giving us the narrowest space possible in which to pass, if pass we must.

I could hardly see through the dust-storm, and dust mingled with the taste of my petrol; but I plunged into the white cloud and rushed through it, stones and gravel dashing high in air and showering on my body. I slipped past as a comet tears down a blue slope of sky, leaving the planets seemingly motionless. Thus seemed the car I had almost grazed but a moment ago; and I could not have told its shape or recalled the features of the two bent goblins who rode it, their chins pushed upward by the wind of their own passage.

Now there was a long gap between me and the first adversary I had conquered. Far ahead I could see the next screened in its own blowing curtain of dust.

The course selected for this race was the most difficult it is possible to conceive. No experienced motor could remember it without a shudder. To dream of running over it at full speed was enough to demagnetize your coil. The terrible white road plunged down into valleys, and lassoed itself over mountains; here and there it turned on itself like a boomerang,

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and most of its bridges were set at right angles. It had every trick, every whim that a race-course could have, and it offered a supreme test of construction and material, as well as driving.

My nightmares now often repeat this road in cinematographic pictures, and I wake feeling as if the petrol had congealed in my carbureter. After that first, murderous hairpin bend, came a great white shoulder of a hill, and I rushed at it like a mad thing. Half-way up was the car that had flitted under the flag ten minutes before me, and I passed it as if it were a mile-stone. Two enemies whistled down the wind, but the third was to prove more formidable.

I had noticed her for her strange wasplike shape, before starting. Now I spied her far ahead, winding gracefully, yet with sleuth-hound swiftness, down into the green bowl of a valley. As I swooped after her, almost leaving earth in the stride I took, I heard my Master open his lips for the first time since we made ready to start.

"Barr-Simons," he said, almost more as if he were speaking to himself than to Arnaud.

I had thought until this instant that I could not desire success more keenly than I did; but now, at the sound of that name, a flame seemed to spring into life in my heart, a flame which must devour me, if I could not pass Barr-Simons and laugh him down,

CHAPTER IX.

I Find Out What Arnaud Meant.

With throttle wide open I raced down the hill.

Barr-Simons' car had dipped to the bottom of the valley, wheeled, and begun to speed up the slope.

We saw it now from below; and the driver guessed, or I fancied he guessed, who had outdistanced the two that had intervened between him and his great rival. The set of his shoulders as he crouched over the wheel seemed to say that his whole soul was bent on defeating the only man he feared.

I gained on him unfailingly. The wind was his enemy, but I had tamed it to be my friend. Soon we were in his dust, and my siren imperiously called on him to give way. For a moment we were separated only by the length of our engines; the next we raced radiator to radiator, the other car laboring; then with a leap I bounded ahead, and a second's space was the space of ten yards between us. I had taken Barr-Simons' road for my Master, and he was forging, beaten, in our rear.

The song of the conqueror sang in my cylinders as I saw before me a great crimson flag that bore the word "Control."

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We slowed, we stopped; the center of a cheering crowd. There were interested officials with stop-watches and books. Questions were asked, entries made, and in the midst of all up came Barr-Simons on his car, as much of his face as showed beneath the goggles dead white under its mask of dust.

At the control Barr-Simons had a little army of mechanics to do him service. Some poured pailsful of water over his hot tires, others flung themselves on the ground and peered under the car in search of loose bolts, while several men busied themselves in handing their master and his chauffeur sandwiches and cool champagne.

Every one in the automobile world knew the great Barr-Simons, and many clustered round his car, paying it and its driver compliments, wishing both success for the following rounds of the race.

As for us, the moment that the millionaire maker of motors appeared on the scene we were forgotten, left to stand in isolation; but it was a proud isolation, and I was glad to feel that my Master, friendless, was happier at this moment than Barr-Simons among all his flatterers. For Arnaud, perhaps, it was a different story; but now that I believed him thwarted I had few thoughts to spare for him.

He had no obsequious helpers when he jumped down to look me over, and see that I was not ruptured

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or strained in any part. No waiting mechanics buzzed round us like bees. After all, this was only the first round, as I heard a sympathizer reminding Barr-Simons. And if there were some, in their hearts, secretly pleased because an unknown had dared to come in before the famous man with his latest invention, none dared to show it openly in his presence. Eyes glanced at me furtively, more in dread than in satisfaction, after the first impulsive cheering for us died down at Barr-Simons' approach.

But it was time to go on. The flag dropped, and we rolled through the control at a foot pace, watched by the experts, numbers of whom ran with us to the far end. What they thought when they saw my propeller put in motion once more, whirling me on with the velocity of a cannon-ball, I shall never know, for I had left them as far behind as if they were in another world before they had time to utter a cry of wonder; but if I forgot them soon, I do not think they forgot me as easily.

As if on wings of fire, I flew through reach after reach of the changing country, which formed the immense arena of this splendid conflict. But I had made a resolve and kept it: Barr-Simons did not come near to me again as I sped on; and when, at length, we came in sight of the starting-point, where thousands of spectators clustered thick and black as hiving bees,

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and stopped under the grand stand whence King and President looked down from their crimson box, the air was rent like a lace veil by the cheers which hailed my Master victor.

We had made the round in less time by many minutes than any other competitor, and it increased my pleasure rather than diminished it, that Barr-Simons should be second, for that fact but seemed to emphasize the rivalry in which we had beaten him, and make it the more personal between us.

My petrol bubbled with joy and pride; and I knew by the way my Master touched me that he was thanking me for what I had done. I was glad that Cecilia Murray was there to see, and Sheila; and I knew that Hugh also was glad.

The second round was like a bit of history which repeats itself. What I had accomplished before I accomplished again, with my Master's unflagging guidance; but, except that, as I reached the spot where I had passed Barr-Simons earlier in the race, I recalled something I had been too preoccupied to notice at the time; a glance of fury directed through his goggles for an instant, and falling on Arnaud's crouching figure. Could it be, I asked myself now, that he had expected something of Arnaud which Arnaud had not performed? Had a promise been bought from Arnaud, which he had failed, after all, to keep,

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either through compunction, or cowardice, or deliberate intention? Had I been right in thinking that a plot to ruin me on the day of our drive from Dieppe to Paris had been brought to nothing by Lia's desire for a ride on me, and my Master's orders for Arnaud to conduct a hired car? Had some new plan been substituted in the place of the other, crushed by a girl; and had Arnaud remained true to his Master, after all—true, against all Barr-Simons' expectations?

These questions flashed through my cylinders, but flashed out again unanswered, for there was little time to think or argue. Action, action, was my one duty, or I should lose the ground that I had gained. So I threw thoughts behind me, as I threw the miles, and appeared once more at the starting-point, this time far in advance of any other car.

The experts were stupefied. From end to end of the immense course the news seemed to have spread that something extraordinary was happening; that it might be a new era had come for the automobile, ushered in by a stranger, an outsider, with a car of his own invention—a car whose importance could not be ignored. Such speed as mine had never before been recorded. I had shattered the world's record. But—the third round was still to come.

A chain made of human links stretched the length of the course, or almost its length. Here and there

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spectators clustered thickly; elsewhere they grouped in twos and threes, and midway, where there were no steep gradients, no sharp turns to menace the racers, the course was deserted for three or four miles. I had noticed, however, in making the two first rounds out of the three, that at a cross-road, far short of the control with its crimson flag, a solitary spectator had chosen to station himself. He had with him a small brown automobile of perhaps twelve or fifteen horsepower, and as he appeared to feel the liveliest interest in the race, I had wondered dimly why he did not select a more interesting point of view. When we were approaching him from afar off he would dart out of the cross-road into the course, a field-glass at his eye, studying me or my Master until we were nearly upon him. Then he would spring out of the way, his lips moving as if with excited exclamations.

I had not troubled myself much about this man and his peculiarities when I made the first two rounds; but, having recalled that vicious look thrown by Barr-Simons at Arnaud, it suddenly occurred to me, as for the third time the solitary spectator sprang into my path with his raised field-glass, that his interest in me was, perhaps, more keen than in other cars. Could it be that it was a malign interest? That each time as he jumped back out of danger, muttering, he shared Barr-Simons' disappointment?

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As I thought of this, as I saw him standing there, far ahead, a small black figure in the white line of the road, fear chilled me for the first time that day. It was as if, while I ran, a vast weight of cold metal had fallen upon me, and I was obliged to bear the burden as I kept up my full speed.

To my Master that small dark figure was evidently of no importance. He kept me to the middle of the road, as if the man did not exist. "One moment more," I said to myself, "and we shall have passed this place; I shall know then that my fear meant nothing. Surely Arnaud will keep true, after all. Soon we shall have won our full victory; soon they'll be cheering themselves hoarse for us at the grand stand."

I rushed at the black figure, expecting it to leap aside, but before I reached it I knew that something terrible was happening. There came the thud of a heavy blow; there was a broken cry which sounded like horror and surprise, rather than pain. The firm hand on my steering-wheel faltered; I swerved, and though it was but for the briefest fraction of a second, I knew that black treachery had been at work. I knew that another hand guided me, the hand of a villain, a murderer, perhaps, and that now it was bidding me slow down.

So quickly had disaster fallen, that for a piston-beat it was instinct rather than knowledge which told

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me that it had come. Then I saw, as well as heard and felt.

My Master was drooping unconscious over the steering-wheel. Arnaud was flinging away a sand-bag with one hand, while with the other he directed me, his jaw falling, his face sickly white.

There were only two thoughts left in the dark chasm where treachery had plunged me from the bright pinnacle of triumph; that my Master was dead, and that I must save his secret, at the same time avenging him by killing Arnaud. As for myself, what did anything matter now? There was no world for me without my Master; and there was a wild joy in the determination to end my life with his, to batter myself out of recognition so that the plotters should not profit by their crime.

Before the murderer's shaking hand could steady me, I leaped off the road, and hurled myself at a dust-white plane-tree growing alongside. I saw horror blanch the face and glaze the eyes of the solitary watcher; I heard Arnaud's cry of desperate fear, as with all the strength and presence of mind he had left he jammed on my brakes; then came a shattering blow, which struck at my own life as well as his.

Next instant my whirling propeller was gashing the gray bark from the tree-trunk, and my motor, the very heart of me, seemed to crack. In my madness I

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rebounded from the tree, flung myself across the road, and turned on my side, my wheels uselessly spinning in the air.

Then, as if through a haze of blood, I saw my Master's body lying in the dusty grass, motionless, as it had lain by my side in blessed sleep many a time in the happy past, when he had guarded me by night. Now he could guard me no more. I had failed to save him, though I would have given my life a hundred times over for his. All I could do I had done, for I felt broken to pieces, ended forever; and no prying eye could tell, I hoped, how he had made me. As for Arnaud, if I had not killed him, I must have come near it, for I had thrown him far away, out of my sight. I was glad of that, at least. My engine stopped, and I believed that my life was stopping, too.

CHAPTER X.

I Suffer All Things.

There was an interval of blankness, like being swallowed up in a wave or a thick cloud of dust. Then came a dull consciousness of continued existence, and I heard Arnaud's voice.

He was alive, then! My vengeance had failed.

Soon, in a blurred way, I saw him—a sorry figure, bending limply over me, looking half his size as he humped his thin shoulders and nursed a wounded arm.

His goggles and cap were off, and the red graze on the side of his face where the skin had been scraped away, the trickle of blood that ran over his eyes, and the sick look of pain that distorted his mean features, brought me some small consolation.

My Master's body lay as I had seen it at first; but the man who had watched from the cross-way was busy with a couple of others who came I knew not whence in righting me on the road. At the same moment I heard the whir of an approaching motor, and immediately I caught sight of Barr-Simons in his car. He tore past us, unheeding, or so it might have seemed to one uninitiated; but I read the meaning of his brief glance, his bitten lip, and the sigh that heaved his

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shoulders. Barr-Simons was rushing on to snatch the victory he had stolen from my Master, and he would not pause for a second, lest he should lose the full glory of success. He had been far behind us, but there was nothing to prevent him from coming in first now.

How I hated him! How I wished that I could have put him in my Master's place. It would be something to live for if I might punish him yet.

The men who had set to work at righting me did not take long about their task. They were dressed like French peasants, but they had a lifting-jack and ropes, which I guessed had been taken from the car in the cross-road; and they had such skill that it would have been folly to suppose them amateurs. They worked quickly and silently, only pausing now and then to see if another racer were in sight; but before the next appeared they had finished and hustled most of their implements away. When the motor that followed Barr-Simons had passed, there was nothing to see save a little group of peasants collected round a battered car that had come to grief and spilt its passengers.

The man who had watched manifested the greatest interest in me and the extent of my injuries; but when Arnaud limped to the still form of my Master and bent over it, half-fascinated, half-frightened, the

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that meant some new emotion, like surprise or fear, the crying abruptly ceased.

"Let me go!" I heard her gasp. "I want to die—oh, I want to die."

Some one else had come, then—some one who was in her way.

"Why should a girl like you want to die?" asked a man's voice heavily. And my interest grew, for—I could not be mistaken—it was the voice of the man who had come to visit Barr-Simons.

"Because I am miserable," answered the woman. "Because there's nothing else left to do. Let go my arm. If it hadn't been for you it would have been all over now."

"It wouldn't," said the man gloomily. "Your agony would be just beginning. You would be struggling there in the river."

So a river ran under the window at the back of the garage, and it was a lonely spot, or people would not choose it to come and drown themselves.

"Don't talk of the agony; that only makes everything so much worse; for sooner or later I *must* do it," wailed the woman. "And I am a coward. You don't know what trouble like mine is, or you would understand."

"Maybe not," said the man; "but I do know that trouble like mine is more than I can bear; and since

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you can't understand, I'll tell you this: when I've done something else which I'm waiting here to do, my idea is to end all, as you were just going to end it."

"How strange—how terrible!" cried the girl, the dulness gone out of her voice, which was singularly sweet and flutelike, "that you—that I—should both be at this spot at the same time, for the—the same errand! But—since you tell me this, why did you stop me?"

"I don't know," said the man; "a kind of instinct, I suppose, that outlasts most things in one's nature: the instinct to protect a woman."

"You have done me no kindness," said the girl, "and yet—I'm glad we've met, glad we've talked. At such a dark moment, when there's nothing to do but end life, there's a dim kind of comfort in having human sympathy—at least, if you're a coward like me."

"I'm a coward, too," the man answered, "but it isn't death I'm afraid of; it's life."

"I'm afraid of both. But it's doing me good to tell you. Does it help you to speak like this to me?"

"Yes. I don't know why, but it does. The best thing I ever had in my past life was a sister. She was about your age when she died—twenty."

"I'm twenty-four. How extraordinary we should be telling each other such things! Fifteen minutes ago we'd never seen each other, and in fifteen minutes

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more, perhaps, we'll be where we can never see anything earthly again. Your being English, and my being English—both making up our minds to die in this forlorn place, far from home, seems more than a coincidence. It is as if there were some Fate in it."

"There's Fate in everything, according to my idea," said the man. "My Fate has been an evil one, dogging my steps always, for years. Queer, if I should have something to thank the brute for, just at the last!"

"For *me*, you mean?"

"Yes. For letting the condemned criminal warm his hands for a minute before his execution."

"What a curious, frank mood it puts you in to be about to die—to have to come to the end of all things, and be standing on the edge of the world, looking over—doesn't it?"

"Looking over—into what?"

"Oh, I daren't think. I used to be quite religious, once."

"I'd swear you're not a bad girl now."

"Perhaps not so very bad. I've not done any of the things that the world absolutely refuses to forgive a woman in, anyhow. But I've—taken money that didn't belong to me."

"So have I," said the man, and laughed, a queer, bitter laugh. "This grows interesting, doesn't it? A fellow-feeling ought to make us wondrous kind."

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"It has—it does. Of course you didn't steal in any vulgar, common way, and neither did I. I should hate, somehow, for you to think that. I held a little money in trust for my younger sister, who's living with relatives in England, and—and I took it to pay for lessons in singing from a teacher who is rather celebrated—but I hate her now. In a way, it's to her I owe my ruin. That's a long story, though; and you and I haven't time in this world for long stories, have we?"

"I don't know," said the man. "I feel as if I should like to hear yours. I'm interested in you, and everything about you. Don't go and misunderstand me when I say that. I'm a bad man, but I'm not dangerous to you."

"Oh, don't you suppose I was sure of you, by instinct? Otherwise would I have talked to you as I have? Why, when you weren't thinking what I meant to do, I could have jumped into the water and escaped from you as well as from everything else in life, if I'd mistrusted the kind of man you were."

"If you had, I should have jumped in after you."

"To die with me?"

"No, to save you. I don't know why, as I said before. A man's instinct again. Shall I tell you what I did? I forged a check. But that isn't why I made up my mind that the end must come—to-night."

"There are more things?"

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"Several more. But they would make a long story, too, a good deal longer, and a good deal darker than yours, I expect."

"I should like to hear it."

"Would you? As much as I would yours? Well, perhaps we shall meet again—beyond the river, and tell each other things—somewhere. Not that there'd be much remembering days of joy when misery is at hand."

"Oh, you read Dante?"

"I used to. Poor Paolo and Francesca!"

"Another bond in common. I studied the rôle of Francesca for an opera Madame—my teacher—had written. She used to say I would make a success in it. Cruel, cruel! Oh, come, let us die, and get it all over. Will you help me to die—friend?"

"No!" he exclaimed. "I can't. I can't do that. And I can't stand by and see you do it. I'll tell you what I will do. I'll go first. Perhaps—when you've seen me go, you'll feel that rather than follow by the same dark, cold way, you'll wait a bit, and try to find something in life worth living on for, after all."

"Oh," she cried, her voice breaking into sobs again. "You mustn't—you mustn't! I couldn't see it—I couldn't bear it. It would drive me mad. Don't make me die mad."

"What is to be done, then?" he asked.

Champion

"I don't know. We might part, and—and neither of us see the other's end."

"Would you *préfer* that?"

"It seems horribly desolate now, after—making your friendship and having your sympathy."

"To me the same. Yet what else is there for us, since you won't let me go first? You must leave me here."

"No, if one is to be left, it must be I. There's no other place where I—where it can happen so easily. This towing-path isn't far from the house where I was living."

"I can't leave you here, unless you're going to follow me into the water—for there's something I'm bound to do at this place before I say good-by to the world."

"Something you're bound to do?"

"A revenge I have to take on a worse villain than I am. I'd better not tell you more."

"Yes, tell me."

"I'm going to set fire to this garage."

"What garage?"

"This little, new, white-plastered building whose wall you're leaning against. I've waited here for hours till it should be so late that there'd be no one about to give the alarm and save the place. I want it—and all that's in it—burnt to the ground. There!

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I've frightened you, haven't I? You don't wish me to die with you now."

"Oh, I don't know. You must have some strong reason. You can't be a bad-hearted man, or even a cold-hearted one, or you'd have looked on and let me drown."

"I used not to be bad-hearted. And I've been finding out in these last few minutes that my heart hasn't turned to stone yet, as I thought it had. You've made me remember that I'm young still. You've made me remember some of the things in life I'm leaving."

"Yes, we're both young. The pity of it—the pity of it! We might have been so happy. We had the right to be happy."

"A brutal, cruel world has robbed us of our rights. Heavens, I wish we could get even with it! I wish we could tear from it a little of all it owes us, as human beings who didn't ask to be born."

"We won't be spiting the world much in dying. We shall be forgotten. And all the people who are worse, and luckier than we are, will go on being happy."

"You make me want to live—if only there were a way. But—Jove! I've thought of a way!"

"I'm glad—for you; though it leaves me alone."

"It doesn't. It carries you along the same road—if you'll come. We'll travel together—*en automobile*."

"What do you mean?"

Champion

"I mean that you and I—it sounds rather crude, but you said yourself that Fate had brought us together on this spot, for the same purpose, at the same hour; a lonely, desperate man, a lonely, desperate woman, from the same country, stranded in a foreign land."

"Yes, I said that. I say it again, because it seems wonderful."

"Well, then, if we were brought together, why shouldn't we go on together?"

"I—I don't——"

"Why shouldn't we be married and begin a career which would get us even with the world that's downed us so far? You're not married already, by bad luck, are you?"

"No, I'm not married."

"I thought not; you have the air of a girl. I've never been enough in love with any woman, since I was out of my teens, to ask her to marry me; but I have an idea that, if you'll give me the chance, I shall fall all the way in love with you. We'd never seen each other an hour ago; but most of the people who marry after a year or two of being engaged, can't say more at best than that they were brought together by Fate—meant for each other—can they?"

"There is no more than that; there can't be."

"Well, then, let's throw in our lots together for life, not death. Already I feel as if having you by my

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side would give me the nerve to dare anything. We might have some good adventures, you and I."

"Have you a plan?"

"Yes, I have. It jumped into my head, full grown, and dressed from head to foot—armored to fight the world. What do you say? You don't know me very well; but maybe you don't hate me so much that life with me would be worse than death—choking out your last breath in this black river?"

"Oh, I can't—I can't think of death as I did. You seem to have half-opened a door, and shown me light."

"I'll open it wide. Will you go through into the light with me?"

"Yes! There you have my answer, for good or ill. Yes."

"The light won't be a sweet, soft light, like that you see in pictures, shining on the heads of pious maidens who're saying their prayers. It may be a lurid kind of light. And there won't be any prayers. There'll be reprisals. Whatever happens we may get some good days; and other people shall pay for them. Does that put you off?"

"No!" cried the girl. "I'm like you. The world owes me a lot. I'd love to make it pay. And I'd love to have adventures. I've dreamed of having them—but I never have yet—except hateful ones. Do you know, I like your face?"

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"So do I yours. I suppose you've heard that it's a pretty one?"

"People have told me so. But you can hardly see it in this faint light of the stars."

"Heaven send they're lucky stars! And my eyes are good, if my conscience isn't."

"Let's forget our consciences and be happy. I've almost forgotten what it feels like to be happy."

"So had I till a few minutes ago. I'll tell you the plan that came to me, and you can judge whether it's the sort you could be happy on."

"I think I could be happy on any that would save me from that terrible, black water that runs so fast. But tell me the plan—no, tell me first your life story, and I'll tell you mine. Let's save the best part for the last. And the future *must* be best, for us both, since the past has been so bad."

"Well—I said mine was a long story; but after all it mayn't be long enough to bore you, since you've agreed to take me on, for better, for worse. My people were gentlefolk—in a small way. I had a good education, and I was always fond of books. I used to be praised for it—but maybe they weren't always the best sort of books. My father was a solicitor. I was to have gone into partnership with him, and I fell in with a racing set, and he got so disgusted that he chucked me, and said I could go shift for myself. A

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man I knew got me a place in Barr-Simons' factory here in France. I was secretary to the manager, and my services were valuable, because I always liked languages, and had a little German as well as a good knowledge of French and Italian—enough Spanish, too, to write a fair letter. Presently I was transferred to England, and became secretary to Barr-Simons himself, in his London office. Things were going prosperously with me, when I got the fever again—the old fever for gambling. I suppose it's in my blood. I was unlucky when I ought to have been lucky, and tried to right myself on the Stock Exchange. I borrowed, and couldn't pay back. I asked for an advance of salary, and was refused a second one. Then—well, Barr-Simons' handwriting's so fatally easy to copy; and specimens of it were under my eyes all day. I was tempted and—I didn't resist. I was found out—that was only a question of time when luck persistently turned its back on me. Barr-Simons could have sent me to prison for five years, if he'd liked. He didn't. Instead he made me an offer."

"That was good of him," said the girl.

"Wait. He wanted my help in ruining a rival—the sort of help that a mouse might give a lion, but important all the same; impossible for him to work his game without it. I was to be spared if I did what he suggested, and when it was done, on the day of the

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Vandervoorst Cup Race, I was to be paid. The sum wasn't named, and I was not in a position to bargain; but I was given to understand that it would be enough to start me in life again, free of worry, free of debt. As a guarantee of good faith he made a show of tearing up and burning a check, which he said was—the check. I was a fool not to guess it was a trick. Now, he not only refuses to pay me a penny for my services to-day, on the plea that it would encourage me to blackmail him, but he denies that I performed any service for him, dares me to tell any story I like, tells me that he's kept the check, and threatens prison if I try to assert my claims."

"What a wretch! I wish you hadn't helped him to ruin the other man."

"He would have been ruined, anyway. I couldn't have saved him by staying out of the game. But now I can punish Barr-Simons for his treachery to me, and his treachery of Cameron at the same time."

"Cameron is the name of—the other man?"

"Yes. Cameron's chauffeur, bribed by Barr-Simons through a music-hall singer I had to do some bargaining with, nearly killed his Master to-day, and prevented his car from winning the race. It will pass as an accident. The chauffeur and I were the only ones who saw what really happened. This little garage Barr-Simons ordered to be built when it was decided

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that the race should be run here. In it is his own car, which won, and Cameron's car, which ought to have won. Cameron's car is badly smashed. It stands in an outer room, and his is in another, which I believe—so Barr-Simons' chauffeur's been saying—is locked with a time-lock, of which the Master alone knows the combination. It's like his suspicious nature to do a thing like that. You see he believes everybody else capable of doing what he is ready to do himself. My first idea to-night, as I told you, was to set fire to the garage before I died, and thus destroy Barr-Simons' car, and his chance of finding out the secrets of Cameron's invention, which he has been trying to get hold of for a long time. Now, I have a different idea—an idea out of which you and I, as partners, might squeeze a living, and make up for the past."

"Perhaps, though, when you hear all about me, you won't want me for—the kind of partnership you spoke of. Men hate women, they say, who do the things they forgive each other. I've been a governess here—the usual English 'Mees'—for two detestable, spoiled children, with a disagreeable, purse-proud mother. She was horrid to me—treated me as if I were a servant—and it was all I could do to manage those singing lessons for which I've paid so dearly, three times a week, missing my dinner to get them, because no other hour could be spared. My one

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thought was to succeed with my singing, and escape from slavery. I shouldn't have come to this dull hole to teach for a mere pittance, if I hadn't known that a great retired prima donna lived here, and gave lessons to a few favored pupils. Because that woman—the children's mother—was so hateful, I was quite pleased when her husband tried to flirt with me a little. It was my revenge. That wasn't nice of me—but you can't think what waspish ways she had! Monsieur Beringer, the husband, pretended to be interested in my music, and one day when his wife had been particularly loathsome, he told me that, if some other authority besides my teacher—in whom he didn't seem to believe—pronounced me talented enough for grand or even light opera, he would use his influence to give me a start. Also he would finance me until I should have made my success.

“Soon after he told me that Signor Carvona, the celebrated tenor, was coming to sing in opera at the time when the motor-race would bring thousands of people to the town. He said he knew Signor Carvona, and would ask him to try my voice. To-day it was tried, and the great singer gave me no hope whatever. My teacher had deceived me. My voice was nothing—only a pretty little drawing-room voice, he called it. And somehow Madame Beringer found out that her husband had been flirting and making me

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promises of what he would do for me. I think her maid, a cat of a woman, must have overheard and repeated a conversation. Madame insulted me and turned me out of her house at an hour's notice, this evening, and Monsieur Beringer was too cowardly to defend me. He tried to save himself by swearing I had worked upon his compassion. Do you wonder I wanted to die? What was there left for me, till you came and gave me hope? My sister's money spent; no way of getting it back; myself unjustly disgraced; no chance of the career I'd counted on!"

"Well, you shall have your career," said the man.

"You don't despise me?"

"I despise you? Why, you're white against black, compared to me. And now you shall hear my plan."

CHAPTER XIV.

I Suffer a Great Change.

So absorbed had I been in the life-stories of these two persons whom I had never seen, that for a little while I had forgotten my own despair in pitying theirs. But when the man had unfolded to his companion the idea which was to make their fortune, I saw that henceforth their stories and mine were likely to be written on the same pages in the book of Fate.

"I said," he went on, "that you and I might take the trail together *en automobile*. There, behind that wall, our car is waiting for us."

"Mr. Barr-Simons' car?" the girl laughed, a little shamefully, as she questioned him.

"No. We can't get that. I've no dynamite to blow his time-lock to pieces. We'll have to be satisfied with the lame duck, but it's a very good duck. It may turn out for us as good as the goose that laid golden eggs."

"You mean we're to take it?"

"Yes."

"But—you said it was broken."

"So it is. But it can go. There's no car made that I can't drive. I shall be able to get this one to go

Champion

shed grateful tears of petrol on her, if I hadn't been afraid of spoiling her dress. She knew that I was no senseless mass of twisted metal and splintered wood. She honored and pitied me at the same time, and gave me credit for the anguish I was suffering. "If only it's fared better with the owner, I shall be thankful," she went on. "But I'm afraid that friend of Miss Cameron's, whoever he is, may be only trying to encourage her. I'm sick at heart about Mr. Cameron, and for him, aren't you?"

"Well, he was a very fine fellow, but we've only known him three days," said Mr. Murray.

"Don't say 'was,' as if he had ceased to be!" exclaimed the girl. "How horrid of you, Dad. I don't suppose we'll ever see anything of him after this, whatever—whatever happens to him, for we have to take our tour, and he'll be going back to England as soon as he's well enough. By the time we get there, months from now, of course he'll have forgotten us. But all the same, I feel as if I knew him better than lots of other men who've been calling on me twice a week since I was a little girl. In spite of what Miss Cameron's friend says about the chauffeur, I just feel, through and through, that the accident did happen through foul play of some kind. I'd give anything to find out what it was, and prove it."

"When you once make up your mind a thing's so,

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not all the king's horses nor the king's men can make you change your idea," said Mr. Murray.

"Nor all the king's automobiles, either," retorted Lia defiantly. "And talking of automobiles, I wish I felt as easy in my mind as his sister seems to do about letting Mr. Cameron's car go into that man's garage till he's well enough to take it back himself. Suppose he's in the plot?"

"Pooh!" said Mr. Murray. "You're daft about that 'plot,' girlie. The gentleman's a friend of the family. Didn't you hear him call Mr. Cameron 'Hugh'?"

"Ye-es, but that might have been his wily way of getting round the sister. Even she seemed to hesitate at first what to do. I suppose we couldn't offer to take charge of the car, could we? Say Mr. Cameron had wanted us to do it in case anything happened. I believe he would truly want it, you know, Dad, for he trusted us."

"We couldn't possibly," said Mr. Murray, looking startled, as if he were afraid that his wilful daughter would commit him to some course of action before he had time to save himself. "We might as well take charge of an elephant. What could we do with the thing?"

"Oh, hire a garage, and wait around till Mr. Cameron could give orders."

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"Well, I like letting you have your own way, little girl," said Mr. Murray, "but I must draw the line somewhere, and I guess this is the right place. Mr. Cameron's sister and her intimate friends are the only people who've got a voice in the disposal of his property, and I'm not going to interfere or let my daughter interfere, even to please you, Lia."

"Oh, dear, I suppose we can't, then," sighed the girl, looking ready to cry. "But I'm just sick about it all. And I feel as if we were standing by watching, without raising a finger, while wicked wretches killed Mr. Cameron and smashed his automobile, and buried them both under the leaves when nobody knew except us. I shall dream it was like that hundreds of times in the nights to come, I know."

"You'll forget all about it when we're sight-seeing again," said Mr. Murray.

"No, I sha'n't. I'll never forget this day. And if I find out I'm right I'll never forgive myself either for not doing something—I don't know exactly what. Anyhow, let us go now to the hospital, wherever it is, and learn something for ourselves about Mr. Cameron. His sister's so absorbed in what Mr. Vandervoorst is saying she doesn't remember that we exist."

"All right, come along," answered Mr. Murray, showing by his alacrity that he was glad to get away from the spot at any price.

Champion

"Just one moment!" exclaimed Lia. She took a step and laid her hand gently on my broken body. "Good-by," she said, "Good-by," Only that one word, murmured twice over, below her breath. But it meant as much as a whole long sentence to me; and her soft tone and soft touch were like balm poured upon my wounds.

Fate was against me, preventing her from giving the help she longed to give; but her sweetness and her wish to serve me and my Master made for me all the difference between the cold despair of utter abandonment and the warmth of sympathy. I felt somehow redeemed from humiliation, my self-respect, at least, saved from the disaster of the day.

If only she had known that Miss Cameron's friend was Barr-Simons she might have continued to fight for me against her father's opposition, and have conquered it in the end. But, even if he had been pointed out to her by neighbors in the grand stand during the race when he flashed by in his car, goggled and masked, she could not recognize him now from any of the other competitors; and neither Sheila nor Mr. Vandervoort had mentioned his name in her hearing. There was no motive to impel her to insist further, and there was no resentment, nothing but gratitude for her kind intention, in the cold tunnels of my cylinders as she let her father draw her away.

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Often afterward I recalled her grieved backward glance, felt again the gentle pressure of her loyal little hand, and heard the echo of that "Good-by."

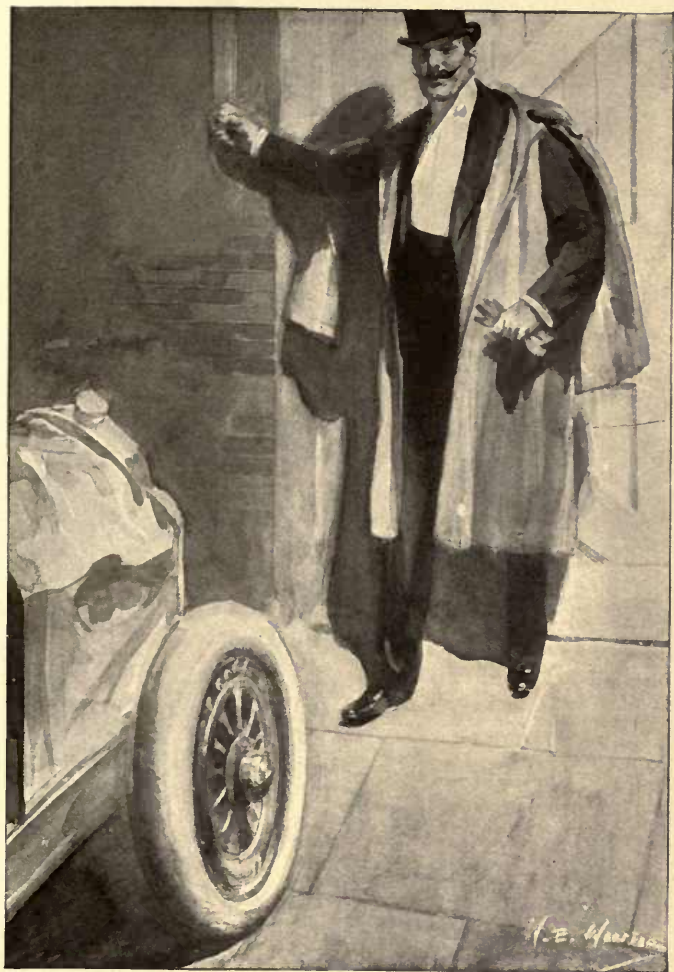
Vandervoort was still talking to Sheila of her brother—not discouragingly, yet not cheerfully—when Barr-Simons moved away and gave directions that I should be at once towed to his garage. All hope of a rescue was over; and, though one other hope was left to me—that I was too broken to give up my Master's secrets—even that was very faint. I felt life strong within me yet, as a sullen weight drawn by a sullen beast I was dragged toward that realm where Barr-Simons' power reigned supreme.

CHAPTER XII.

I See Once More the Man of the Cross-road.

When the gates of the garage had shut upon me, the awful sense of isolation, of helplessness, was even worse than I had thought, and once more I felt as if my cylinders must crack with my despair. It would be useless now for any cam to try and actuate my valves again.

But I had had time for a dozen changes of mood before the silence of the dark garage in which I'd been locked up and deserted was broken by the sound of a key turning. Then the door opened, and I heard a man's footsteps. Some one was moving about; some one found and switched on the electric light, flooding the place with a cruel, white glare. It was Barr-Simons, and he had changed into evening dress, with which he wore a decoration in his buttonhole. Instantly I guessed that he had stopped for a stealthy look at me on his way to the grand dinner of which I had heard my poor Master speak—a dinner given in honor of the victors in the race. I guessed, too, at the impatience he must have been feeling, and how he must have seized the first chance of tearing from me such secrets as I might be powerless to conceal, and



"IT WAS BARR-SIMONS."

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note them for his own guidance, for use before Hugh Cameron could recover from his wounds and defend the offspring of his brain.

He locked the door again and hurried to me, like a hungry wolf that scents a meal. "Now for you, my beauty!" he muttered. "You pretty nearly did for yourself, but not quite. It's your master who suffered most, after all. By Jove! one would almost think you banged your head into that tree on purpose to spite me."

So that was in his mind! I only wished he knew the truth, and that the minute he learned it I could explode and tear him into atoms. His addressing himself to me, as if acknowledging the fact that I was sentient, seemed an added insult instead of a valued compliment, as it did from my poor Master, or Lia Murray. But if I had had the power to destroy him I would have yielded it for the privilege of hearing from his lips—even if the news came with a sneer—the truth about Hugh; whether he were living or dead, and whether, if he lived, he were like to recover and win back his stolen honors.

"You didn't quite succeed, did you?" he went on. "That queer screw of yours I'm afraid you've done me out of, you brute—the very thing I wanted to get at, of all others—the thing I'd have given a cool hundred thousand to have in my hands, free of patent

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rights! But I shall be able to guess at it a bit, maybe, from the mangled remains, and I shall measure and weigh you. I shall find out how Cameron balanced his weights to combine so much strength with so much lightness. I shall poke into the secret of your wheels for all it's worth, and take it for my own. I shall know everything there is to know about your materials: how the fellow made your steels and bronzes. I'll have that air-cooling contrivance that I've been fussing over with such disappointing results for a whole wasted year. And what with all you give me, and the help I'll buy from that little sneak, Arnaud, you'll be at my mercy. Not a thought of your Master's that I sha'n't be able to pass off as my own for my next machine, thanks to pluck and business instincts."

"Business instincts, indeed!" I tried to hiss out through a small leak whence my petrol was dripping. "Business instinct spells bribery and murder with you; just another word for the same thing. Oh, if only my Master gets well, he may beat you yet. Oh, if only my Master gets well! It seems to me that any one who sees your two faces would take his word against yours."

Unfortunately, he did not understand, or he might have lost that temper of his, said to be so execrable, and have battered me into worse condition, out of re-

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venge. He was just about to settle down to the enjoyment of such superficial examination as might be made by a man dressed to go out to a grand dinner, when there came a knock at the door.

He muttered a word I should not have liked Lia to hear, and stood hesitating whether to answer or not. But the knock came again, this time accompanied by a voice which struck me as being familiar. For an instant I could not place it in my memory, though I knew I had heard it lately; but when Barr-Simons unwillingly decided to open the door, with the first ray of white light that plucked the newcomer's face out of shadow I recognized it.

The man of the cross-road knew that Barr-Simons was here with me, and had come to pay him a visit. I had seen him before, only in his motor-mask and goggles; but, noticing him particularly as I had in the two first rounds of the race, I had fixed in my being the one feature I was able to see clearly. That feature was the chin, and it was a peculiar one, cleft in the middle with a deep dent. Also, I had had the impression of a reddish mustache.

Now I saw the whole face, but the chin was still the most remarkable part of it.

Compared to Barr-Simons, the man was a little man, but he was actually of about the average height, perhaps looking smaller because he was thin, so thin

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as to suggest that he might lately have recovered from an illness, or have suffered severe privations. Standing at the cross-road, in a thick motor-coat, he had looked a more personable fellow; now there was something pitiable about him.

"I followed you, Mr. Barr-Simons," he said. "I knew you were here."

"So I deduced, from your impertinence in beating on the door," answered Barr-Simons, with the same cynical coldness with which he had taunted me in my helplessness.

"I merely knocked," answered the other with civility, but his eyebrows drew together, nervously or irritably. "I see no impertinence in that. You promised to speak with me as soon as the race should be over."

"I was occupied with more important people," sneered Barr-Simons.

"I should have thought I was rather important to you," said the man, flushing all over his sharp-featured, but not ill-looking, face.

"Then you thought wrong," retorted Barr-Simons. "But now you're here, what do you want? Get it out quickly, for I'm in a hurry. I'm due at the dinner in twenty minutes or so."

"What do I want?" repeated the newcomer. "I want my pay."

"You've had it."

Champion

"What!"

"You heard me, I think. But I'll be more explicit if you like. I engaged you, and hired an automobile for you, to watch a certain part of the track, just as I engaged certain other men to watch certain other parts, in order to be in readiness to give me help if I needed it."

The thin man laughed bitterly, and echoed Barr-Simons' words again. "To give you help? That's what you call it, do you? Well, do you want to know what I call it?"

"Frankly, I'm afraid it would bore me."

"Then you shall hear it whether you like or not. You had to take me into your confidence, otherwise I couldn't have been trusted to carry out instructions without making some fatal blunder. You'd paid Cameron's chauffeur to bash him on the head, in the first round of the race, and I was to take him away in my motor-car, dead or alive; but not until I'd made sure that his car was safely in the hands of your creatures—creatures I'd engaged to do your bidding, so that you—the great Barr-Simons whom every one must recognize—shouldn't have to appear in the affair."

Gilbert Barr-Simons laughed contemptuously.

"Who on earth would believe such a cock-and-bull story as that, if you were fool enough to try and

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spread it? A discharged employee in my works—not only discharged, but discharged for dishonesty, and the proofs in my hands to show to all the world if I choose to crush you, instead of trying to help you back to the right path, as I have done.”

As he listened to these words, the thin man staggered slightly, as if Barr-Simons had struck him a blow. His clenched hands relaxed, and I saw beads of sweat suddenly sparkle on his forehead like grains of diamond-dust glittering in the white electric light.

CHAPTER XIII.

I Overhear a Strange Conversation.

I thought for a second or two that the unfortunate wretch would break down and fall in a dead faint, but he pulled himself together with a supreme effort, and had his eyes been daggers I should have had the pleasure of seeing Barr-Simons lie dead beside my tires.

"You are the devil incarnate!" the newcomer flung impotently at the great man.

"If you had been polite I might have spared you ten minutes, for old acquaintance's sake, and the time when I used to think you a fairly decent fellow," said Barr-Simons. "But as you seem inclined to be rude, I have no more time to give you. I am going to shut up the garage now."

"I will have justice—or something like justice!" stammered the thin man, a patch of red staining each high cheek-bone.

"I tell you, you've had all from me that you'll get in the way of reward for your small services," Gilbert Barr-Simons said icily. "Best be careful, or you may look to get something else—something that you'll like less and deserve more than anything you've had yet."

Champion

"You'll give me no more money?"

"Not a penny. It would be on my conscience if you turned blackmailer as well as forger. I have a certain check still in my possession."

"You lie. I saw you tear it in pieces and burn it."

"You thought you saw all that. But you didn't know me, or you'd have distrusted your own eyesight. Now I'm going to dinner."

"And I may go——"

"Where you choose."

"Provided I don't interfere with you?"

"It is impossible for you to interfere with me. I'm a big man. You're a little man—in more senses of the word than one."

"I was of importance enough in your schemes this morning."

"You flattered yourself if you thought so. Any man of moderate intelligence who could drive a tup-penny-halfpenny hired motor would have suited me as well. And, anyhow, you've ceased to be of the smallest importance to me now; the sooner you realize that the better it will be for you in the end."

"What if I show up at the dinner and denounce you for what you are?"

"You would spend your night in prison or a mad-house, that's all; and, really, either one would be a suitable enough lodging. But there, I've let you

Champion

bother me too long. Understand, once and for all, that you can say what you like, do, or write what you like. It will harm me no more than a crawling wasp that's lost its sting. That's my final word. Now, since you don't appreciate civility, I'll have to try something stronger. Get out, or I'll call the police."

He took hold of the man by his slight shoulder and pushed him out of the garage, switching off the electric light near the entrance, and locking the door after himself. Once more I was left alone in darkness and silence. But both were grateful to me. Barr-Simons would not come back now till after the dinner was over. I wished that meanwhile I could set the place on fire with what petrol I had left, and burn up gloriously, with all my Master's secrets.

How long a time passed before I again heard voices I cannot tell, but it felt like hours, and I had begun to fear that I might expect to hear the grating of Barr-Simons' key at any moment, when I was startled by a strange sound under a small open window high up in the wall. While the light had been turned on, I'd happened to notice the window, but I had no idea what the outlook from it might be. I could only judge that it probably did not look on a public thoroughfare, because of the time that passed without any noise of voices or traffic.

There was but one faint sound, so faint that I had

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not been conscious of it at first; a monotonous murmur like the lap, lap of moving water.

The new sound which startled me from my dull lethargy was very different from that, however. Suddenly, close under the open window, a woman began to moan and weep as if her heart were breaking. She gave little whimpering cries which exploded into sobs at the end, and I listened with my petrol seeming to congeal, for I had never heard a woman cry before.

Could it possibly be Lia, I wondered; Lia, who had heard bad news of my Master, and had come here to mourn him, near me? Or could it be Sheila Cameron?

But something inside me said "No" to both these questions. They would not come to Barr-Simons' garage at this hour of the night, whatever had happened. Besides, they were both such dainty little ladies, they would not sob uncontrollably and wail, unless in their own locked rooms, I was sure.

I was very sorry for the woman who was weeping there alone in the dark, for I knew not how to sympathize with anything that suffered, whether human or so-called mechanical; but I did not believe that she was a thoroughbred, like Lia Murray or Sheila Cameron.

For two or three long, painful moments she sobbed chokingly, and then, with a quick, indrawn breath

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man moved quietly to him, and spoke in English: "Why in Heaven's name, if you were going to do it, didn't you do it before he'd won all the honors?" he asked.

"I couldn't," groaned Arnaud. "Mon Dieu! If I had dreamed I should feel like this, I wouldn't have done it at all. If only I had not! I am a murderer. God knows I didn't mean to strike so hard."

"You'd better have thought of that beforehand," said the other. "Don't whine now. You've earned your money very badly, but I suppose you've earned it."

"Thirty pieces of silver," sobbed Arnaud. "Where is the field that I may go and hang myself?"

"I should think you'd been near enough to death without hanging yourself," sneered the other. "Why didn't you do the thing decently, and take the steering-wheel before the car got out of control?"

"I did all my possible. I was so sick that I thought I should faint before it was over. I wish I had been killed with Monsieur, instead of left to be torn with this anguish!"

"If you mean your arm, it will be all right in a day or two. If you mean remorse, you can make yourself easy; Cameron isn't dead. He'll live to put you in prison, if he remembers what happened and you don't get out of his way before he can tell tales."

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"I don't think he knew what happened; he trusted me," stammered Arnaud, paler than ever. "But if he lives I can't let him see me again. I could not bear his eyes. Mon Dieu! shall I ever get out of my ears that awful crack his head gave when I——"

"Shut up!" growled the other. "What is done is done. Try and be a man. Of course I'll have to swear, and the rest will swear, that he lost control of the steering-wheel and was thrown out, with you, when the car ran into the tree. Stick to that story and you're safe, whatever happens. You're to get your second thousand to-day, I believe, and after that you can drown your recollections in drink for the rest of your life if you're so inclined."

Arnaud's only answer was a groan. But I guessed what was in his mind. He would be the richer for this crime by two thousand pounds—a clear thousand more than he stood to gain by honesty if I had won. He hoped that his 'Toinette who had lured him to this—'Toinette, for whose sake he had thrown away honor and stained his hands with blood—would marry him now, as she had led him to believe she meant to do.

But I did not believe that she had ever meant it. I remembered how she had smiled scorn and contempt, which he did not see, that night in our workshop. Barr-Simons had had Arnaud watched, perhaps, in

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his comings and goings; had come to know of his admiration for the music-hall singer, and had bribed her first to encourage him, then to tempt him to his fall. Perhaps I need not have wished a more crushing punishment for Arnaud than to learn that the woman he worshiped had no longer a thought for him; yet I was merciless, and did wish him worse. There was no misery possible for a man to suffer that I would not have wished Arnaud to suffer. And I dared not believe what the other man had told him—that my Master was not dead.

Many cars passed us, their drivers not unseeing, but intent on their own speed record. It was nothing to them that one had fallen by the wayside. Such accidents formed a part of every race. Perhaps they had seen others, as they passed along the course; it was very possible that our disaster was not the only one, and nobody dreamed of foul play. How I longed for a human voice to denounce the traitor, and the villains who had tempted him! It was terrible to realize that I alone knew the truth, and that I was condemned for ever to silence.

At least, they did not wish for my Master's death, or if they did they had the air of wishing to save him. The man of the cross-road bent over the still body, and poured some liquid from a silver flask between the shut, white lips. Hugh did not move or sigh; but

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after a discussion between the owner of the brown car, his chauffeur, and Arnaud, my Master was carried across to the little automobile and laid in the tonneau. Then the car was turned and driven away up the cross-road, for the race was not over yet, and the course was not free.

My first thought was one of horror that Hugh should have fallen into the hands of the enemy, but in a moment I had reflected that, if he still lived, they would do him no harm. No doubt they wished to pose as humanitarians, and be praised for the care they had bestowed upon the victim of the accident. Still, it was agony to have him taken from me, not sure whether he was dead or alive, and fearing that, in either case, I should never see him again. My petrol choked me as he vanished from sight, and my greatest regret for myself was that I had not suffered as much damage from my suicidal act as I had hoped.

Arnaud remained with me, as did several of the pretended peasants; but as they had been joined by a number of persons who had somehow heard the news, they could have no private communings, even had they wished it. I hated the traitor more bitterly than ever, as—in his Master's absence—he became the hero of the occasion, pitied and sympathized with for his misfortunes, and the fate of the car and its owner.

He accepted all, chattered of his wounds and his

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sufferings, and answered questions about the accident, giving a dramatic, specious, and utterly false version of the catastrophe, which, unless my Master lived and recalled the thing that had really happened, could never be contradicted. Arnaud looked me over, under the interested eye of his admirers, and having discovered that my propeller was smashed to atoms, my bonnet flattened, and my steering-rods bent, nevertheless pronounced my vital parts to be intact. My wheels, too, were unbroken, and I was furious to hear him say that the steering-rods must have been defective in the first place, or the accident could not have happened. If only I could have got to the tree before he jammed on my brakes and reduced my speed, he would not have lived to tell these lies about his Master's work!

Before leaving the scene of the accident, the watcher of the cross-road had shouted to Arnaud that he would get some farmer of the neighborhood to send a horse and tow me off the track. I could have hissed with disgust at this, for I knew well enough that the farmer with the horse would be only another actor in this melodrama of deceit. The idea must be to get me away to some spot still quieter, still safer, and more secluded than the one selected for the "accident" to occur, and there to give me over to the tender mercies of the man who had inspired the whole plot.

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My one hope was that the race might be over before this plan could be carried out, and that Sheila Cameron, or even Cecilia Murray's father, might lay claim to me, by the right of a relative or friend of the owner, until my future fate should be settled. Indeed, there was a bare chance that, if Cecilia Murray had heard the bad news, she would insist upon rescuing me for Hugh's sake. She had suspected treachery, and warned my Master. Her quick mind would tell her that the accident was no accident, and she would be ready to do her girlish best in Hugh's interests, I knew. But—would not anything she could do be too late?

While I wondered desperately, counting the moments, hope died with the approach down the cross-road of a huge cart-horse, led by a sullen-looking giant of a man. Racing cars were still dashing by at intervals, and my fate was sealed. The horse and I were somehow ignominiously attached to one another, to the animal's distaste as well as mine, and, despite the resistance I offered by making myself as heavy and unwieldy as I could, I was compelled to the ignominy of following at the great clumsy creature's tail.

Slowly, by cross-roads, they towed me back to the starting-point of the race, which by rights I should have won; and, as by this time all the cars had come

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home, been timed and noted, the wretches did not spare me the humiliation of being dragged past the grand stand, showing my battered body to the world which had cheered me with delirium when last I passed that way.

I tried to comfort myself by saying: "At least, this is better than being hurried off to some dark hole by Barr-Simons' emissaries, and immured forever. Now, Sheila and Lia Murray will see me, after all. I may be rescued yet."

But I could not delude myself into being cheered by such sophistry. It was clear that Barr-Simons' game was deeper than I had guessed, and that he was comfortably certain it was all in his own hands, otherwise he would not have run the risk. Or, if I were wrong in this surmise, it was because I had so battered myself that he dismissed me from his mind as worthless, and would simply shame me for the pleasure of humiliating his rival, my maker.

Every one stared at me, as I trailed miserably by behind the cart-horse, all with curiosity, some with pity in their glances, but more, I thought, with that kind of morbid satisfaction in the failure of others, which I have learned since then is too often characteristic of human nature. Had I triumphed to the end my victory would hardly have been a popular one, seeing that I was a rank outsider, and a foreign

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outsider, too; whereas Barr-Simons, though calling himself an Englishman, had a large factory in France, where he employed French workmen.

I had borne all of ignominy I could bear, it seemed, without dropping to pieces in my mortification, when a thing happened that changed the color of the sky for me.

CHAPTER XI.

I Fall Into the Hands of the Enemy.

They had towed me to the middle of the grand stand, when I saw Sheila Cameron and Cecilia Murray. They were not together, of course, but they were standing up, in the midst of other women who were still seated; and the same expression was on both faces—an expression of horror and distress.

The news had come by telephone before I was dragged upon the scene, and they had heard it. Then, suddenly, they caught sight of me, and I heard—or fancied that I heard—a low, pitiful cry from each. Without any thought except for my Master and his car, the two girls left their places and ran down the steps between the boxes and rows of seats, impulsively bent on making their way to me.

At first, Mr. Murray tried to restrain his daughter, but, seeing that this was useless, he followed to keep her in countenance. Sheila's companion, too—the handsome, tired-looking woman I had noticed before—would have kept her back if she could; but Sheila did not seem to feel the hand on her arm; and her friend, after an instant's hesitation, adopted the same course which Mr. Murray had taken.

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Just at this moment, the great Barr-Simons—the man who for novelty of invention and speed combined had won the Surprise Cup—was being congratulated by the French President, the visiting King, and Vandervoort, the instigator of the race. He glanced away, to see Sheila and her companion hurrying to intercept me, and excusing himself, joined them. But already the Murrays were at my side. The beautiful girl, looking as pale and anxious as if she and my Master had been old friends, began to ask questions of the men who had dragged me to my martyrdom. She spoke in pretty, schoolgirl French, studied from books, and needing practise to perfect pronunciation and accent; but if they had not been taken aback by so much beauty and youthful impetuosity, they might easily have understood. As it was, they merely looked stupid, and stared, looking still more stupid when Mr. Murray began doing his laborious best to help her out. Then, Sheila with the handsome woman, and Barr-Simons came forward.

There were tears in Sheila's eyes, and the straining after self-control took something from the feminine softness of her young face, increasing the likeness to her brother. No wonder Lia saw it, remembering Hugh's description of his "little sister," that happy day of our run to Paris!

"Oh, are you Miss Cameron?" she asked. "You're

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so like him—you must be the sister he told us of, I think. I hope your brother isn't badly hurt? My father and I would be so glad of news of him."

"If I only knew!" exclaimed Sheila, no longer able to keep back the tears. "We've only just heard of the accident, and nobody seems to know what has happened to him."

"Where's his chauffeur? Why isn't he here with the car?" cried Lia, a bright color streaming over her face, and her eyes flashing. "I know whatever happened was his fault. I warned Mr. Cameron he was a traitor, that he meant to ruin him if he could. I——"

But Barr-Simons stepped forward, very polite and very grave, his motoring-cap in his hand. His black hair was whitened with dust, and it made him appear older and less harsh than he would have looked without the powdering. "I beg your pardon," he said, "but I think you are doing the poor chauffeur an injustice, for so far from having brought about the accident, he did his very best to prevent it, and has been badly hurt. You are no doubt a friend of Mr. Cameron's? Well, I am his friend, too, I hope; and Miss Cameron is here with my wife and myself. I am sorry that his sister or any friends who care for him should have heard the news of the accident in such a sudden way; I hoped it might have been kept

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from Miss Cameron till I could have broken it myself, and told her that there are the best hopes for her brother's recovery."

"You are sure?" implored Sheila, while Lia awaited the answer in silence.

"Sure. I couldn't get to you till now, you know, or you should have heard my version of the unlucky accident before any rumor of something dreadful and mysterious began going round, and it always does on occasions like this. I passed the car myself, on the course, just after the steering-gear had gone wrong—must have been a little weakness, everybody thinks—and it had smashed into a tree. But Hugh was sitting up, drinking out of a flask some one had offered him, and the poor chauffeur seemed the worse off of the two."

Now, I knew he was lying, and my hopes, which had revived, died down again. The scoundrel was merely trying to make his impression on the two credulous girls; and the worst was that he was likely to succeed. Sheila's eyes brightened, and the cloud of suspicion began to clear away from Lia's charming face. I was sure she did not understand that this man was Barr-Simons, Hugh's enemy; and seeing him with Sheila, hearing that Hugh's sister was staying with his wife, must have convinced her of the man's sincerity.

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"Surely you didn't pass without doing anything for Hugh?" exclaimed Sheila, knowing nothing of the cold selfishness which racing men must cultivate if they would be successful.

"Of course not," he lied again. "I slowed down and gave directions that he was to be taken to a hospital, which is, luckily, rather near. A friend of mine was close by—had been watching the race in his automobile from a cross-road; he promised to take charge of everything, and let me have news for you, Miss Cameron, as soon as he could.

"Then I was obliged to go on to clear the way for other racers. It wouldn't do to block the course; though, as far as I was concerned, I would gladly have sacrificed my own chances of winning to do anything for Hugh, who ought by rights, I feel, to have beaten me. He made a splendid fight, Miss Cameron, and you may well be proud of him, though by bad luck he failed. If you agree, I'll give orders that his car shall be taken to my garage, and kept there until he's well enough to claim it."

Sheila seemed distressed and slightly confused. "I—I wish I knew what my brother would wish," she murmured, remembering, no doubt, his hints, which had almost amounted to accusations, of Gilbert Barr-Simons as his enemy.

But who, seeing and listening to the man now,

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would not have trusted him, believing that he had been misjudged?—who, not knowing the black truth of him, as I knew it? He appeared sympathetic, considerate, and even gentle, and, though he may have guessed the cause of Sheila's hesitation, he showed no sign of offense.

"I think," he said, "that your brother would wish me to look after the welfare of his car, because, no doubt, he values it of all things; and if I don't take care of it, what is to become of it? He has no intimate friends here, I believe; at least"—and he glanced at Mr. Murray and Lia—"in the automobile world. Edith, try to persuade Miss Cameron that I am right."

"I'm sure he is, dear," urged his handsome wife kindly; and Sheila could not hold out longer.

"Very well, I suppose you know best," she faltered, with visible reluctance, yet fearing to be ungracious and unjust.

"Good!" said Barr-Simons cheerfully. "That's settled! Now come along, and I'll take you to see your brother."

Sheila moved forward eagerly; then paused, turning shyly to the Murrays. "Would you—you are dear friends of his, aren't you—would you wish to—to go with us?" she stammered.

Lia flushed so painfully that tears were forced to her eyes. "We're very much interested in him," she

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said, "but we've known him only a short time. We couldn't take the liberty of visiting him with you at the hospital; but if we should go somewhere near there and wait, would you—let us know how he is?"

"Certainly, we would," Sheila answered, "if you're sure you won't come with us?"

"My daughter is quite right," Mr. Murray replied for the girl. "It would be a liberty for us to go and see Mr. Cameron with his sister."

While they were talking, and before Barr-Simons could get them away—though I thought he was anxious to do so—Mr. Vandervorst, who had escaped from his distinguished companions, came toward the group. His face was even nicer than it had been in the photograph pinned up in our workshop, but now it was very grave. He spoke to Barr-Simons in a low voice, yet I heard what he said. He was asking to be introduced to Hugh Cameron's sister.

"Why, of course, if you wish," returned Barr-Simons, evidently far from pleased at the suggestion. "But she's awfully upset about her brother, just now. Don't you think another time——"

"It's about her brother that I want to speak," said Vandervorst. "I should be obliged to you if you'd introduce me."

Short of ungraciousness and making himself disagreeable to the young millionaire, Barr-Simons could

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hardly hold off longer; and I know now that people think twice before making themselves disagreeable to millionaires, even when they, too, are rich and of consequence. He brought Vandervoorst nearer to Sheila and mentioned his name. Apparently Mrs. Barr-Simons and the American had met previously, for they bowed to each other before Vandervoorst began speaking very earnestly and gravely to Sheila.

Seeing her thus occupied, and not wishing to put themselves forward, the Murrays moved away and stood at a little distance. Then they whispered to each other; and a moment later, while the group of four were murmuring together, oblivious of them, father and daughter came straight to where I now stood, miserably awaiting the settlement of my fate.

The two men who were with me were French, and Lia began to talk to her father about me in English, as if they had no existence for her.

"Oh, Dad!" she exclaimed, "isn't it too sad to see the poor darling half-dead, like this, when he was so gay and splendid on the way to Paris, and was so brave and wonderful to-day—only a little, little while ago! Yet look at him now."

"Great Scott, Lia, what do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Murray. "Who's half-dead, after being so gay?"

"Why, the dear car, of course," said Lia, quite impatient at not being understood; and I could have

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a few miles for me. At Nimes there's a man I've had dealings with who'll put the car up for me in his garage, and fit it with a new body—on tick—which will disguise it. I shall tell him I've bought one of the broken racers—several came croppers to-day—for a song, and that I want it turned into a touring car, as soon as possible. It will make a fine one, a splendid asset for two adventurers. With smart clothes, a title—we've only to choose one—and a magnificent high-powered automobile to travel in, we shall find the world our oyster. I think we couldn't do better than begin with the Riviera. The high season's on till after Easter, and luckily for us, Easter falls late this year. Do you speak French well enough to be a French comtesse? Or had we better be Russians—prince and princess?"

"I don't know a word of Russian."

"And I, not half a dozen. But all the Russians of the higher classes speak French, even to each other and in their own homes. Princes grow thick as blackberries in Russia; we will be touring the Riviera on our wedding trip, and that part of the romance we will make genuine."

"If we should be found out?"

"The danger's part of the adventure. But it's so late in the season. Most of the Russians will be gone. And, anyhow, we'll reap a golden harvest before the

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storm. The one difficulty, after we've got the car, is the lack of ready money—just a bit to start out with—the rest will come like the air we breathe.”

“I have a little jewelry we might pawn—a ring left me by an aunt; it might be worth ten pounds; a string of pearls—quite stingy small ones—Monsieur Beringer gave me secretly on my birthday; a watch that was my own mother's, and a few other trifles. We might get thirty or forty pounds for the lot. It wasn't enough for me to go on with. But it might do for *us* for a few days.”

“Good. Nothing could be better. We'll raise money on the things to-morrow at Nimes. Just now there's lots to do. I have to climb up this ladder, which I borrowed from the gardener's next door, and creep through that tiny window up there—it will be a tight squeeze, even for a thin chap—bring out the car, and fire the place behind me.”

“Oh, *must* you do that?”

“Yes, or they'll be hot on our track. If the garage is burnt to the ground we shall have several days' start at worst, for they won't discover at first that the remains of both cars aren't still in the place. Besides, I want more complete revenge on Barr-Simons than cheating him out of poor Cameron's secrets; though that loss alone will touch him to the quick. He shall lose his own property, too, as well as his chance to pick

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another man's brains. Do you grudge me my satisfaction?"

"No-o. I should feel as you do, if it were the Beringers. And the wretch deserves to suffer—he's a villain."

"Then we're agreed. There's no more time to play with now. I'm going to place the ladder."

Silence followed this last announcement; but presently I heard a scraping noise, and then the man's voice spoke close to the open window, high in the wall.

"Jove! I can't do it. I can't get my shoulders through. Are we to be beaten, after all—by a hole in the wall?"

"Let me try," said the girl eagerly. "I should love to help you. I'm such a little slim thing, I know I can squeeze through, and I'm not afraid to let myself drop on the other side. It can't be much of a fall. Then I'll unlock the door, and you can walk in."

"Good!" said the man. "You're a brave child. Already you're showing me the stuff you're made of. I may owe my whole success to you; and it wouldn't be the less sweet for that."

Again there was silence. The pair were too intent upon the work they had in hand to speak, but not more than two or three minutes could have passed before I heard again a scratching noise below the window. Then came a light, quick breathing, as of

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one in excitement; a scrambling, a low laugh, and a little cry of triumph.

The high window had been cut out of the darkness which lay thick in the garage, a small square of glimmering blue. Now it was filled with black shadow, and the breathing grew heavier and more excited. At last, the blue square was clear again, and I heard the tapping of little pointed shoes against the wall. The girl had squeezed through the window; she was hanging from the frame by her hands; as soon as she found courage she would drop!

She and her newly allied partner were not moralists, but they were better than Barr-Simons, for they had red blood in their veins and human hearts in their breasts. Besides, they planned to snatch me and my Master's secrets from Barr-Simons; and, as it seemed to me that anything which could possibly happen would be preferable to staying with him, I found myself sympathizing with the past troubles of the strangely met pair, and ardently wishing for their future success. It did occur to me that perhaps this man might try to steal from me the secrets he had torn from Barr-Simons; but I could see how difficult it would be for a man in his position to take advantage of any knowledge he might obtain, even if he appreciated its full value. Barr-Simons had two factories and plenty of money. This fellow had nothing,

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and no credit. He had decided to run the risk of running off with me partly for the sake of revenge, partly because I could start him upon a career; but the success of that career would depend upon his concealing my identity and real nature. There lay protection for my Master's secrets, if he should live and be able to make further use of them; and in my joy at that thought I would not dwell just then on the difficulty of making myself known to Hugh—should we ever meet again—in the disguise my new owner meant to put me in.

I had but a few seconds in which to carburate these reflections before the girl let herself drop, knocking over some tins in her descent, which made such a clashing and rattling as they rolled about the floor in the darkness that I was afraid some one passing the door might hear, and give an alarm.

The girl fell among these cans, and must have hurt herself, for I heard her give a little whimpering moan, like a child's, as she picked herself up; but aloud, she cried to her friend cheerfully, "I'm all right. Now I'm going to find the electric light; if I can; and open the door."

At this, he must have deserted his post under the window and hurried round to the front of the garage, for while the girl was still feeling her way through the darkness, his voice called her at the door. "Slip

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back the bolts," he said. "Barr-Simons has got the key, of course; but when the bolts are undone the two doors will swing open when I pull."

Her skirts brushed against me as she passed me, on her way to obey instructions; and a moment later I heard the clatter of the bolts, as with all her force the girl shoved them out of place. Then came a draft of cool air, as the man entered, shutting the door again.

"I couldn't find the switch," she said, her voice trembling with excitement.

"I know where it is," he answered; and almost instantly the garage was flooded with the crude, white light which a few hours ago had shown me the face of my arch enemy.

Now I saw once more it showed me the face of the man whom that enemy had thrust out, lightly daring him to do his worst. I looked with more interest at the sharp, clever features now, the bright, dark eyes, the cleft chin and red mustache. And I observed quite as eagerly the girl whose story I had heard.

I did not wonder that the man had been taken with her appearance, and fancied her a suitable partner for such a career as he proposed. She was small and slight, not in the least queenly, nor was she a real beauty like Cecilia Murray; but her figure was perfect, willowy and voluptuous though slender, and fem-

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inine in every charming curve. The face was piquant, in shape rather like a heart, and it was framed with a cloud of soft brown hair, loosened by her fall. The nose was dainty, if insignificant, and the pouting mouth seemed made for the singing of love ballads and lover's kisses, but the great attraction was the eyes. Not that they were remarkable for form or color, but she had a way of looking up suddenly from under heavy white lids and thick dark lashes that must have set a man's blood beating faster. Automobile as I was, I could not help rejoicing that so enticing a creature had been saved from the river, even if for a career which might leave her short of such merit as she still preserved.

"You're even prettier than I thought," said the man, blinking at her, his eyes half-dazzled by the sudden glare of the electric light.

The girl thanked him with a smile. "And you are nicer, too," she laughed. "But do you know what has struck me? We've told each other everything about ourselves except our names!"

"That doesn't matter much, since we're going to choose a new one between us," he said. "But mine has been Paul Fanning."

"Paul you must keep. It's my favorite for a man—another coincidence!" she exclaimed. "I'm Mary Precious."

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"You'll still be precious—to me," said the man. "And why not change your Mary for Marie, to the world? As for our title, we'll decide on it later, over a glass of champagne."

"Champagne sounds better than water—with that black, running river photographed on my mind," cried the girl. "But now for the car that will take us to the champagne."

"Now for the car," he echoed; and gave his attention to me.

The first thing he did was to turn on my switch, and as there was strong compression in one of my cylinders, I could but explode, even if I had wished to be dumb, when the spark lit with life the waiting molecules of gas. Softly, rhythmically, as in the happy days of old, my motor sang its song.

"Good!" said Paul Fanning. "I thought the engine was all right, and it is, you see. We shall be able to do the trick, my Princess. As for this fan affair, it's smashed beyond hope. I'll get rid of the thing, for I can't make use of it one way or another—but I'm hanged if Barr-Simons shall have it to brood over. Just in case the fire should spare it to him, I'll throw what's left into the river." And when he had snatched up a spanner and disconnected the broken wings of my propeller from my body—as if I were a fallen angel doomed to punishment—he

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pulled a bench under the high window, and flung out the battered remains of my greatness. I heard an answering splash of water, and though I felt a responsive pang, still I was glad, for my loss was Barr-Simons' loss as well.

His next act was to stop a leak which he suspected, and to fill me up with all the petrol I could hold. He also thriftily stowed away here and there as many spare *bidons* as I was able to carry, and annexed an acetylene-lamp which he found. Then, turning off the light for prudence's sake, before he once more threw the doors open wide, he mounted into my Master's seat and drove me out into the night.

It was easy to tell that an unaccustomed hand was guiding me; still, none save an all-round expert and clever driver, such as he evidently was, could have got me to move when touching me for the first time. He took me to a little distance from the garage, and brought me to a standstill in the intense black shadow cast by a large chestnut-tree. A low whistle called the newly named Marie to his side, and he bade her be seated on me while he went back to "finish the business."

"Be careful," she whispered; and I could hear her breath coming fast and irregularly as she waited in the darkness. At last she gave a smothered cry; and at the same instant a light sprang up behind me. Then

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came the sound of running feet, and Fanning was lighting the lamp which he had fastened deftly onto my battered bonnet, and mounting quickly to the driver's seat.

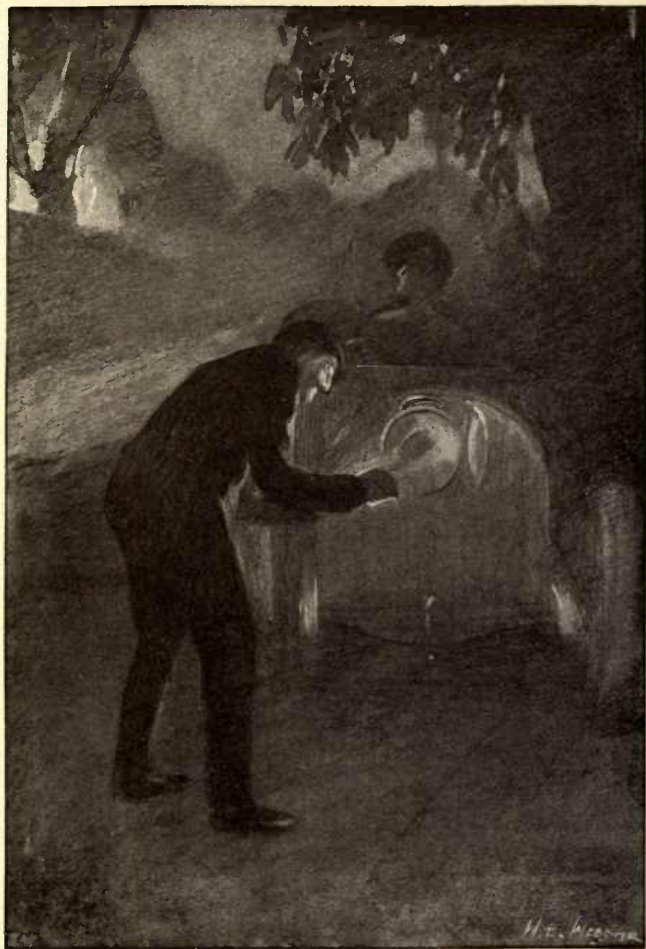
Damaged as I was, I could not run my best, when he had started me; but I limped along willingly, grateful to this adventurer who was taking me, broken as I was, out of Barr-Simons' clutches.

"How did you do it?" asked the girl, as I whisked round the corner of a narrow street like a lane, and into a wide, open road, lined by a few suburban villas.

"Drenched the place with all the petrol we couldn't carry, and flung in from outside a piece of lighted cotton-waste," answered Fanning joyously. "I dashed the doors shut, so that the light shouldn't be seen too soon, but it was a pity I had to; open there'd have been more draft. There's no fear, though; nothing could save the place now. The garage was run up in a hurry; Barr-Simons' chauffeur is in the sulks on account of that time-lock, and is drowning his sorrows in drink at a café in the town. The fire's sure to have fifteen minutes' start, at the least, before the alarm can be given, and then, by the time the firemen get on the scene, the roof will have fallen in."

"I'm glad there's no house near. I should hate to think we'd endangered people's lives," said the girl.

"No chance of that. Barr-Simons is the only one



" FANNING WAS LIGHTING THE LAMP."

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who'll suffer," Fanning chuckled, and the girl joined him in excited laughter, as we fled on and on through the night, out into the quiet country.

Thankful as I was to get away, carrying the secret of all my Master's inventions, I bore an aching burden of despair which grew heavier with each kilometer that I ran. I was leaving Hugh Cameron behind, and perhaps I should never know whether he still lived in the same world with me, or had gone to another, where the best automobile could never hope to follow.

It was not yet midnight when we started, and dawn—for me a sadly different dawn from the last—was beginning to trail a pale torch along the horizon in the east, when we drove into a large, sleeping town. We had passed other towns, but had kept on the outskirts; and when I heard Fanning say to his companion, "This is Nîmes," I knew that we had come to the end of our journey for the night. I remembered only too well what was to happen to me at Nîmes.

Slowly we wound through quiet streets, where the shuttered windows of houses were like fast-closed eyes, and stopped at length before the barred doors of a garage.

"My friend lives on the floor above," said Fanning. "There's an electric bell, and I'll have him down in two minutes. Then, when all's settled, you and I'll have our first breakfast together. You must be starv-

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ing with hunger as well as cold; and afterward, when hot coffee has put life into you, I'll find you lodgings, which will do well enough until we're married."

The girl, who had no wrap, must have been chilled to the bone, but she answered gaily, and I liked her for her pluck.

The electric bell was rung, and after a few minutes' delay a side door, opening from a stairway which led to the floor above the garage, was noisily unlocked. A man peeped out, and at sight of Fanning flung the door wide, exclaiming in French at the surprise. He was tousled, his feet bare except for slippers, and he had hastily pulled on a pair of trousers over a flannel shirt.

For a minute the two gabbled so fast that I could scarcely catch a word, but presently Fanning began volubly to explain that he had "bought for nothing at all"—this was strictly true!—a car which had been badly damaged in the Vandervoorst Cup Race. Now, he wanted to keep it in his friend's garage; and as he had seized the opportunity afforded him by the automobile of running away with a young lady whose parents objected to the match, he prayed his *cher* Nicolas to give him and the car secret sanctuary. No one must dream that he and his fiancée were in Nîmes. They would be married as soon as possible, and meanwhile Nicolas must order a new body, or, better still,

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find one that would answer ready made, as if for an automobile of his own.

Evidently the friendly Nicolas had known Fanning in the latter's palmy days; and not dreaming what a man of straw he was now entertaining, he promised to arrange everything to his good Paul's satisfaction. The master of the garage was introduced with much ceremony to the charming fiancée, and the doors being presently opened, I was driven into the garage.

It proved to be a large one, with several inner rooms, and I was locked up in one of these, a miserable, homesick automobile, with an undying sorrow gnawing at my valves.

There were so many things which I longed to find out that I was glad when, after an hour or two, Nicolas and Fanning returned to me, with another man. They looked me over thoroughly, and the stranger, whom they called Monsieur Soubise, took a number of measurements, which he wrote down in a note-book. He seemed as jolly and agreeable as Nicolas, and asked Fanning questions about the great race.

They all talked of the burning of Barr-Simons' garage and the destruction of his car, and I could tell by their conversation that the news had been in the morning papers. The chauffeur, who had been drunk at the time, was suspected, and Fanning solemnly

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pronounced the opinion that the fellow was a worthless chap, more than likely to be guilty. Neither Nicolas nor Soubise said a word about the Cameron car in connection with the burnt garage, and I guessed that Barr-Simons had talked as little as possible about its presence there. Those who knew would probably suppose that I had perished in the fire with the winning automobile.

The talk did turn, however, to my Master and me; for we had made our mark in the history of motoring before we were treacherously swept off the field; and I don't know what Fanning's inward feelings must have been as he had to answer questions about Monsieur Cameron and his wonderful invention. It was only at the last that I had the unspeakable satisfaction of hearing from a word dropped by Nicolas that my Master still lived.

"They say he may get well, after all," he remarked. "And if the papers tell truth, Vandervoorst is taking a great interest in his recovery."

"That must annoy Barr-Simons," said Fanning, "for it's no secret that he was jealous of Cameron, and wouldn't have won if the best car hadn't been smashed."

"This automobile seems to be a novelty, and of clever design," observed Soubise.

"Paul has told me that it is the invention of a

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Monsieur Henley, who has made a twin car to this, expecting a success, but thinks nothing of either now that he has failed," explained Nicolas.

This was a bold stroke of Fanning's, for a man named Henley had actually been a competitor. I had heard my Master mention the name to Arnaud.

Nothing more happened to me for the next few hours, but after a dark interval of silence—save for voices of men and motors outside my closed doors—Fanning and Nicolas appeared again, to superintend several workmen whom they let loose upon me.

I had had fair warning what my fate was to be, but I had not realized how bitterly I should hate it—how keenly I should feel the pain and humiliation of the change. It was like death to be torn to pieces by indifferent hands of strangers, who stripped off my neat racing-body of aluminum, and I loathed the smell and color of the crimson paint with which my wheels were now lavishly smeared.

Days passed, after this first degradation, each one more disagreeable than the other. Of what occurred outside to my new owners I could only conjecture, but apparently nothing arose to mar their plans; for Fanning dropped in at his old friend's garage from time to time, and was always—outwardly, at least—in a jovial mood. One afternoon the men at work upon me were invited to drink his health and that of

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"Madame," and I deduced that the marriage was an accomplished fact. If there had been difficulties in the way, no doubt *le cher* Nicolas had helped to bridge them over.

As to the things which happened to me, I was only too sure, no conjecture being needed. My bonnet was altered in shape, and I was changed from an all-conquering racer into a mere touring car, with a great body swelling out into a tonneau behind the driver's seat, and having a roof to cover both. There were glass windows and screens, and springy cushions covered with crimson leather, and the paint on this gorgeous erection was also a glaring crimson, to match my changed wheels.

Though shorn of my magical propeller and so altered that even Hugh Cameron himself could not have recognized me, except by examining my engine, I was still Champion—Champion unchanged at heart, and worthy of the name, because of my superior powers. There was little consolation in this, however; indeed, perhaps it but made the pain sharper to know myself a monarch, while to the rest of the world I was no more than any other showy, high-powered automobile, conducting rich tourists about the country.

Through Nicolas, Fanning was able to obtain a new number-plate; exactly how, I could not find out,

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but I fancy I must have been re-registered in Nicolas' name, and the moment my red paint was dry I was loaded up with some new, smart-looking luggage. This was a sure sign that we were about to start off in search of the adventures Paul Fanning had promised his Marie; and, though it was late in the afternoon when the boxes came, I took it for granted that we should get off at once. I was provided with lamps as fine, though of a different make from those I had worn in happier times, when my Master took me out at night for my glorious trial spins; therefore, I would be well able to turn night into day; and I was not surprised when Marie followed the luggage into the garage within half an hour after its appearance.

She was now very smart, and so was Fanning, who preceded her, dressed like a gentleman chauffeur. Marie had fitted herself up in a neat but jaunty coat, which reached to her heels, a motoring-hat with pretty wings, and an arrangement of chiffon that formed a thick scarf and veil. How the pair had contrived to obtain these things, as well as to have the expensive changes made in my get-up, I could not imagine; but I expected to find out sooner or later from their conversation.

They bade good-by to Monsieur Nicolas, and mounted to the two front seats; then Fanning, who had taught himself the intricacies of my mechanism

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during the fortnight of waiting, drove me grandly out of the garage.

I noticed how carefully Marie had swathed her pretty face and hair with folds of chiffon, how long were the tremendous flaps of Fanning's cap, and how like a mask was the large piece of leather that framed his goggles. "They are determined not to be recognized in case there should be any one about who ever saw them before," I said to myself; but I was to learn presently that their motive for hiding their faces was more subtle than I imagined.

CHAPTER XV.

I Become an Adventurer.

We had not been out of the garage long before my new owners began to talk.

"Well," said Paul, "off at last! Are you happy?"

"I would be, if I hadn't that dear, kind little Nicolas on my conscience," answered his Marie.

"There it is!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid you weren't cut out for an adventuress. You mustn't mind things like that."

"I shouldn't, if he were rich. I want only rich people to pay. And he was so trusting! He saw us through everything."

"Nicolas isn't worrying. I've told him I expect supplies in Monte Carlo, and will send him a check to cover the whole sum; and I mean to keep my promise."

"How?"

"I don't know yet. That's part of the fun, for a born gambler."

"I suppose so. I mean to feel like that, too," said Marie.

Yet she sighed. Paul was right. She wasn't cut out for an adventuress.

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We drove on slowly, through beautiful country, until after dark; then when we had run into a town called Tarascon, it seemed we were to remain for the night. We stopped at a large hotel, which had a garage of its own, into which I was taken, and there I heard Fanning say to one of the attendants in a lordly way, that he had been obliged to discharge his chauffeur, and was in immediate want of another. "The ungrateful fellow was cheating me in the most amazing manner," he went on, "and under his influence the maid of Madame la Princesse had also become dishonest. We must stay here until we can find a competent man and woman to take their places."

If my sense of humor had not been pretty well knocked out of me during the last black fortnight, I should have exploded at this "Madame la Princesse." So she was that already! And it was impossible for their highnesses to give themselves the pain of traveling farther without a chauffeur and a maid.

The attendant was all servility to his exalted client. He was sure that he would be able to recommend to Monsieur le Prince an accomplished young man who, if not used to driving this particular make of car, was so experienced that after one trial he would know as much of the automobile as Monsieur himself. As for a maid for Madame la Princesse, she would have to demand advice of *la patronne* of the hotel, and voilà,

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a jewel among young women, would immediately be at her service.

Next morning the accomplished young man was actually forthcoming, and arrived early at the hotel garage, with the view of being inspected. Monsieur le Prince did not send for him to his apartments, as the chauffeur evidently expected, but presently appeared in person, in the garage. I heard his voice, and the voice of the Princess before I saw them; and when they did saunter into my line of vision, I had a shock of surprise.

Mary Precious had had pale complexion, with eyelashes and brows only a little darker than her brown hair. Paul Fanning had had singularly colorless skin, with auburn hair and a red mustache. But the Princess possessed masses of golden hair and beautiful pink cheeks. In contrast with this gold, her eyelashes and eyebrows looked almost black. Altogether she was a dazzling being, so changed that I should not have known her if I had passed her in the street.

As for the Prince, his hair was a very dark brown; his skin was olive, and he wore no mustache. Despite the cleft in his chin, he was even less like Paul Fanning, if possible, than Mary Precious was like the Princess.

Now I knew why they had said good-by yester-

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day to Monsieur Nicolas with their faces and heads covered from sight with chiffon, cloth, and leather. They had prepared for their new parts before starting, wholly or partially, and had not left themselves too much to do after arriving at the first stage of their journey.

Paul Fanning and his bride had now vanished into space, and would never reach Monte Carlo, whence Monsieur Nicolas was expecting to hear from them; but the Prince and Princess would arrive there, and would then, perhaps, take upon themselves Mr. and Mrs. Fanning's obligations.

The chauffeur was introduced to the Prince and Princess by the attendant who recommended him, and in this way I learned their highnesses' names. They were, it seemed, Prince and Princess Vasiliévna, who had been making a tour of France in their automobile and intended to motor to Monte Carlo, where they would stay so long as they amused themselves. The young man, who gave his name as Jacques Potin, was delighted with the prospects of an engagement with such exalted personages. He was smart-looking, had plenty of credentials, and seemed quick at picking up hints concerning me. He had never seen anything like me before, it became evident when he set himself to examine and master my mechanism; but he was too politic to express surprise, and seemed satisfied when

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the Prince mentioned that I had been manufactured by a new firm in St. Petersburg; that I was, in fact, the first successful car made in Russia. He mumbled a jaw-breaking name which apparently suggested nothing to the chauffeur; but Potin was too wise to say so. And it was as well, perhaps, that he did not pretend to have heard it before.

Potin was duly engaged; and he and the Prince took me out for a spin, while the Princess stopped in the house, and, presumably, selected a maid from among various applicants. At all events, when we started off next day, there was a neat, dark young woman to tuck the Princess in, and arrange the hand-luggage. She did not, however, go on with us, but was sent to Marseilles by train, where she was to engage rooms for her master and mistress.

If my own affairs had not been going so badly, I should have enjoyed that run from Tarascon to Marseilles. But, great lumbering, red bulk that I was now, bereft of my Master and half my most valued characteristics, what was the soft southern landscape to me? The distant mountains, the glimpses of deep, blue sea, the dark cypresses and silver olives, the rich color of roses and scarlet geraniums spraying over gray walls, only made me the sadder for their beauty.

After London and Paris, Marseilles was by far the biggest town that I had seen yet. It was after-

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noon when we arrived, and turned into the glass-roofed courtyard of a white, gaily decorated hotel. It was a large courtyard, and all round it ran a slightly raised platform, covered with matting. Here and there, against the white house-wall, stood a huge, blue pot containing a palm, or flowering plant; and the many green-painted wicker chairs, grouped round little tables, were occupied by ladies and gentlemen drinking tea.

They all looked up with interest as I appeared; but if they were curious about me, I was equally curious concerning them; there were so many of them, and they all—or nearly all—had such an odd sort of resemblance to one another. Whatever else they might be, they were English, I was sure, although there was something different about them from any other English people I had seen. The men were all dressed in tweed suits and brown boots, as much alike as possible, and even their neckties were tied in the same way. They were lean and bronzed; their hair was very short and very neat; they looked as if they were fresh from cold baths, and most of them had an air of self-reliance and command, as if accustomed to order and to be obeyed. The ladies, too, might almost have been sisters. They were brown and thin, like the men, and all seemed to be of the same age, their simple, but well-made dresses cut from the same

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pattern. They wore coats and short skirts and blouses, and an air of being certain they were right, and better than other women.

I was wondering where these people could have come from, and if, though they were so many, they could all be members of one enormous family, when Paul murmured to Marie, as he helped her down: "Some P. and O. ship must be just in. These Anglo-Indians won't be much good to us, I'm afraid. They never have any money; or if they have, they know exactly how they mean to spend it. Rich Australians would be more in our line, as pigeons to pluck."

"I see two who look as if they were made for us," Marie whispered back to him. Her eyes had been quicker than his, but some suggestion or glance of hers telegraphed him the right direction to look, and I followed his example. Just round the shoulder of my tonneau stood a tall old man who was less afraid of betraying an open interest in a stranger's automobile than the self-satisfied, well-groomed Anglo-Indian men and women. He was not at all self-satisfied, nor was he particularly well-groomed, but he looked rich; and so did the youngish, smartly dressed woman who sat by the tea-table from which he had just risen.

He had a shock of white hair, a fat, red face, coarse hands, and a big lumbering body, with which he did not seem to know what to do. The least experienced

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automobile would have known at first glance that he was not a gentleman, and to a motor brought up as I had been his vulgarity was offensive. Still, he had a good-natured expression, and so had his wife, though hers was mingled with silliness; and I felt sorry for the pair, somehow, they seemed so isolated from the rest, and uncomfortably conscious of their isolation.

"That's a fine car—a car that *is* a car," the vulgar old man remarked audibly to his wife; and even the Anglo-Indians deigned to look approving. Several servants in the hotel livery darted to help the chauffeur unload the luggage; the landlord came out, followed by a young manager, both bowing and rubbing their hands. Altogether I began to understand exactly what Fanning had meant when he assured Marie that there was no more certain way of inspiring confidence and obtaining respect—another word for credit—than touring in a handsome automobile.

Their highnesses were expected, it appeared, for the maid Thérèse had arrived in advance, and had taken a suite in their name. People allowed themselves to warm up to increasing interest, which showed through their reserve, as they learned that the newcomers were a Prince and Princess, but my owners did not put on any grand airs. They were so gracious to the landlord and his servants, speaking sometimes in French, sometimes in English, that the "pigeon" was

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encouraged to hop up and offer himself for the plucking.

"Nice motor-car you have there, sir," he ventured, looking me up and down, edging so close that he could have touched me with one of the big sledge-hammers that were his hands.

The others all threw toward him a glance of scorn for thus putting himself forward, but he was so eager to enter into conversation with a real Prince that he was not disturbed by their disapproval.

"I am flattered that you should admire it," said his highness in English, which he artistically adorned with a slight foreign accent.

Seeing that her husband was not going to be snubbed, the stout young woman rose and sidled nearer to me. "I never saw one as handsome, anywhere, did you, Jos—Reginald?"

If there could be one name less suited than any other to the red-faced old giant it was the name of Reginald; and I thought he answered to it sheepishly, as if he were no more at home with it than with the big seals that he constantly fingered on his elaborate gold watch-chain.

"I never did," said he. "Would you think it a liberty, sir, if I should ask you the make, and whether it can be got in this part of the country? For, as a matter of fact, my wife has been pestering me to buy

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her a motor-car of some sort, as soon as we landed, and I should be happy to find the twin of this."

"It is of Russian make," lied my Prince glibly. "But no doubt you could order one if you did not mind a little delay. Meanwhile, as Madame is kind enough to fancy mine, we shall be pleased, before we leave to-morrow, to offer you both a little run."

"Goodness! you *are* kind!" exclaimed the stout young woman, turning peony-red with joy. "Reginald, why don't you thank the Prince?"

She brought out the last word in a loud voice, so that, if any of those stiff Anglo-Indians had failed to catch the title, they might hear it now.

Poor creature, she was probably thinking that if a Prince and Princess were so polite to her and her husband at first sight, they could not, after all, be such outsiders as their shipmates' manner had forced them to believe.

"I do thank you sincerely, in the name of my wife and myself, and we accept with distinguished pleasure," responded the old man, as if he were reading aloud a written answer to an invitation.

"We will arrange the little excursion later, then," said the Prince, with careless pleasantness. The two ladies bowed to each other; and their highnesses then went into the house, leaving the chauffeur to attend to me.

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He took me to a garage which belonged to the hotel, and so far as fine touring cars were concerned I had the place practically to myself, but there was an antiquated little motor of a modest twelve horse-power, which was the property of the landlord, and I learned from her that there was not much doing in our way at Marseilles. Touring motorists seldom stayed the night; and she would have liked to know why I was stopping, but I gave her an evasive answer.

I was left to myself for the night by my owners, but I had a good cleaning up from the chauffeur, who was visited while he was at work by the French maid. He was a smart-looking young fellow; she was far from a plain girl; and, both being young, naturally they had already discovered an affinity. They began by talking of their master and mistress, in whose title and importance it was clear that, so far, they believed; but when they had exhausted the question of the Prince's probable generosity, the mysterious newness and fewness of the Princess' frocks, her singular lack of jewels, the politeness of the landlord, the handsomeness of the suite of rooms engaged, the couple fell to discussing their own affairs. They were honest, as far as I could judge, but vastly curious, and eager to save money for the future. "If the ship is sinking," said I to myself, "these rats will be the first to leave it." And I wondered how I should be

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involved when the wreck came—as it must come one day.

Next morning, about nine o'clock, I was taken round to the hotel door by the chauffeur under the direction of his master. In the courtyard reposed the luggage I had carried the day before, but close beside it other luggage equally expensive-looking, if a little more weather-beaten, was neatly piled. To my surprise, and somewhat to my resentment, I was loaded up with the whole quantity, most of which was stacked on my roof—a structure which I detested as much as a hunchback must detest his hump.

Then, when all was ready, out came the Prince and Princess, accompanied by the old red giant and his stout young wife. As for the Anglo-Indians, they had disappeared, having no doubt taken train for home; and, though it may have been snobbish, I was not sorry that they should be unable to see me boarded by the common pair, who were not at all the sort of people my Master had intended me to cart about Europe.

This time Potin was sitting at his master's feet so that the giant could sit by the Prince in the place next to the driver's seat, and his wife, with the Princess, could have the roomy tonneau to themselves. Thérèse again went on by train. We were en route for Monte Carlo, and I soon picked up enough scraps of information from the talk between the two men on the front

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seat to make out that, instead of taking a short run with us, our guests were going all the way. I put two and two together in my cylinders, and said to myself that the pair of pigeons must have been enticed with a good deal of judiciously scattered corn during the first evening of their acquaintance. I called up the scene: the Prince and Princess affable and condescending, the pigeons preening themselves in the warmth of their highnesses' graciousness, delightedly displaying the new friendship with which they were honored, under the indifferent eyes of their late shipmates, who had not cared to associate with them.

Again and again the old man exclaimed at the Prince's goodness in taking them on to Monte Carlo, where they had meant to travel by train, just to "have a look at the Riviera" before going to England. It was a pleasure, said the Prince. It was the greatest kindness he had ever experienced or was likely to experience, said the pigeon, and he and Emmie would remember it as long as they lived. I thought that in all probability they would, but perhaps not in exactly the way their grateful souls supposed.

The pigeon's name, I soon discovered, was Ruggles—J. R. Ruggles, of some outlandish and unpronounceable town in Australia. Emmie, his wife, had taken advantage of the middle initial to call him Reginald, but I don't think their highnesses believed in that

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“Reginald” any more than I did. What they did believe in was the Ruggles’ money; and there was every sign that it at least was genuine and plentiful. The Ruggles type is not clever enough to start off on a career as adventurer and adventuress; they are born to be pigeons, and pigeons they will be while they have feathers to pluck.

Mr. Ruggles confessed his complete ignorance of French and of any other language except English—English as it was spoken where he and Emmie came from. He had hesitated to attempt to tour in Europe, but Emmie had given him no peace; and now here they were, very happy so far, and fortunate, it was true; but what would become of them when they had been dropped down at Monte Carlo, and had no longer the wonderful kindness of the Prince and Princess Vasiliévna to depend upon, he was hanged if he knew!

“If we can be of help to you and Madame,” said the Prince, “there is no reason why we should part company directly we arrive at Monte Carlo. My wife is English, though she has lived much abroad; and to hear the English language is a joy to her. You are almost the same as English, is it not? Australians are children of the old country. My wife is but a girl; we have not been married long, and it will be a pleasure to her to have the friendship of a lady so nearly English. What we can do for you, we will do

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gladly; a little translating, a few hints, perhaps, as to the customs of the country."

"I—I really don't know how to thank you, Prince," stammered poor Ruggles, "and no more will Emmie. You are almost Royalties, if you aren't quite, and we only plain folk, with nothing to recommend us to such as you—for what's our money to princes and princesses, though it may make us somebodies in our own part?"

"What, indeed?" echoed the Prince airily, as he drove me along the exquisite road. "It is your kind hearts which recommend you to us. Is there not some saying in English as: 'Kind hearts are more than coronets?'"

"Well, only to think of your knowing that, and taking stock of it—and you Russian, too!" exclaimed the giant.

"Russians are human," said the Prince. "And when we feel a kindness for people we do not forget."

So they went on, paying compliments to each other; and every now and then I caught a few sentences of the ladies' conversation in the tonneau. Little Marie, though too genial in nature for the typical adventuress, was an actress born; and her stories of her husband's magnificent palace in St. Petersburg, his vast ancestral estates in the country, must have been dazzling enough to the *nouveau riche* Australian woman.

Champion

"Isn't the Prince the gentleman on whose estates such a splendid lot of oil has just been discovered?" asked the respectful Emmie. "Reginald told me that Vasiliévna was the name he'd read in the newspapers—something about a company which was just going to be formed?"

"Yes, that is my husband's estate," replied Marie tranquilly. "There will be a rush for the shares, I believe, though I know very little of business. People will not get all they ask for. But half are my husband's; and he will part with a few of his to friends for whom he cares the most; I know he has promised some to a cousin of mine in England. But I mustn't chatter on like this about such things. He wouldn't wish it. He is very old-fashioned in some of his ideas, and says women should not talk of men's affairs."

"But you wouldn't mind my just telling Reginald, would you?" asked Mrs. Ruggles. "He has plenty of money; but he's like other men of affairs, he always wants a chance of making more; and now he'll be dying to buy Vasiliévna oil shares the minute they come on the market."

"Oh, I'm afraid they're oversubscribed, or whatever they call it, already," said the Princess. "But rather than disappoint your husband, I will speak to mine, and beg him to let Mr. Ruggles have a few of his shares. You are not old friends, to be sure; but you are the

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first friends we have made since we came into France, and I am sentimental about such things."

At this I gave a little snort, which made the Prince think that something was wrong with my silencer; but I controlled myself instantly, and glided on.

Now I began to see their highnesses' game. There was no longer any mystery as to their choice of a title. Paul Fanning was the sort of man who, once embarked on a scheme, would carry it off bravely; and probably he had reminded himself that the boldest course is often the safest. Evidently there was a Prince Vasiliévna, living, perhaps, in such a remote corner of Russia that it was not likely he would be personally known by his few pleasure-seeking countrymen still lingering on the Riviera. And the name was to be a source of revenue to the pair who had annexed it. These Australian pigeons would not be the only ones to be plucked, I prophesied, nor would others be long in following their example. I told myself that I should not be surprised if the generous Prince proved willing to spare a great many of his own shares in the oil company to friends of his.

I was ashamed to be a partner, even a silent partner, in such a scheme as this that was opening out before me; but, bad as it was, I preferred being mixed up in it to the fate I should have suffered in the hands of Barr-Simons. I could not help being a little excited,

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too, as to what would come next; and magically lovely as the country was—far more enchanting than anything I had seen—I let some of the best features of the fairylike landscape pass almost unnoticed, while I thought my own thoughts, and listened alternately to the talk of the two men on the front seat, and the two women in the tonneau.

By the time we had got as far as Cannes, the hotel at Monte Carlo, where the four would stop together, had been settled upon; and among the many kind things the Prince and Princess had promised to do for Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles was to help them choose some jewels. The dear Princess was so surprised to hear that Mrs. Ruggles had as yet no tiara and no rope of pearls—not even a diamond dog-collar!—that the poor lady decided not an hour must be lost before she supplied herself with the articles in question, which, if not exactly necessities of life, appeared to be necessities of high life.

She had, she explained apologetically, only been waiting until she arrived at a place where one could make the best selection; she had thought of Paris, a few weeks later. But when the Princess spoke of the operas at Monte Carlo, where one must vie with the crowned heads of Europe, Mrs. Ruggles saw at once that there was not an hour to lose in fitting herself out for the brilliant contest.

CHAPTER XVI.

I Am Dragged into Strange Schemes.

If it could afford any consolation to me, at least I was seeing the world; and many a motor would, I suppose, gladly have been in my tires.

I found Monte Carlo even more dazzling than I had expected from the stories I overheard the Prince telling Mr. Ruggles. Perhaps if I could have got into the Casino, which, judging from the talk, seemed to be the center of interest there, I might have been even more impressed; but, though I saw, as we passed, that I could easily have mounted the gradient of the front steps, I should have stuck in the door. I had to be satisfied with the garage, to which Potin drove me when the passengers had been deposited at a fine hotel, entered through a beautiful garden of palms and climbing roses. It was by far the grandest garage I had seen yet, and the cars it housed were of the most aristocratic rank, hardly one without a crown on its panels, or at worst a coat of arms. Perhaps I should have been a little jealous of one or two of the most magnificent, if I had not been deeply conscious of my real, inward worth, far beyond their meretricious attractions—if only they had known.

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But they did not know, and such cars as had been undisputed rulers of the garage until I arrived, were inclined to be standoffish. They glared at me with their big lamps as much as to say "Who is he?" But I bore a Prince's coronet—trust Paul Fanning for such details—and when to a question, I answered that I was of ninety horse-power, it was seen that there could no longer be an excuse for superciliousness, whether I were to be admitted into the garage circle on friendly terms or not.

I was not taken out again on the day of our arrival; and that night, when even the latest-working mechanic had gone away, there was a good deal of talk among the automobiles who had known each other longest, and much exchange of confidences. Their masters and chauffeurs would have been astonished, I am sure, if they could have heard what their motors really thought of them. According to these critical cars, there was scarcely one good driver among the lot, and many complained of severe pains in their gear-boxes, due to careless changing. One, standing next to me—a very fine-bodied automobile, of considerable power and *esprit*—assured his best friend, an elderly but gentlemanlike German car, that as two of his teeth had been broken that very day, he didn't see how he could possibly run to-morrow.

The belle of the garage was a beautiful Mercédès, so

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young that she need fear comparison with no other automobile even of the newest fashion. But, like most feminine cars, she was a gossip, and consoled herself for the reputation she had to keep up for silence while running, by carburating some bit of scandal or other for every minute that the more serious cars would listen to her. It was wonderful how much knowledge of her owner's affairs Mercédès had contrived to pick up while running them about; and if I had not lately been painted a rich crimson color, I should have turned red of my own volition at some of the anecdotes she related.

When she had told everything she could think of about her people and herself, this smart car deigned to take notice of me.

"Your shade goes nicely with mine," said she, "better than that of any Body here. That crimson of yours is exactly the thing to set off my dark green. I shall run in next to you to-morrow if you'll contrive to be in the same place; or, if I get in first, you must shove yourself in close to me. If you have the right way with your chauffeur, you can easily make him think he's doing it himself. That's my trick to manage mine. What is your make, pray? I'm sure, by your appearance, it must be something good. I have some very nice cousins, F.I.A.T.'s; perhaps we shall find out that we're distantly related, or, at least, that

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some of the same petrol runs through our tanks. Anyhow, we are certain to discover that we have mutual friends, if you will tell me all about yourself."

This was the last thing I wished to do with such an auto-cat; and I answered with a discreet blending of politeness and evasiveness. I could not let myself be looked down upon by my companions, who fancied themselves so extremely exclusive; therefore, I hinted that I was of a make so new, that in their experience as touring cars my fame could hardly yet have reached their valves, though it was likely to do so soon. I added that my owner was a person of importance in the automobile world. (That was true indeed, if he still lived, my poor Hugh!) and that my adventures, if related, would surprise any car. I could not, however, speak of them, owing to private reasons.

"One thing I should like to know, before—perhaps—letting my acquaintance with you ripen into friendship," said Mercédès, "and that is: whether you are really air-cooled? I've always wanted to meet an air-cooler, and there are those here who believe you to be one."

I admitted that they were right, and Mercédès seemed inclined to think the more highly of me. But a big car from Paris which had been her favorite till I came in, grumbled to his own engine. "Pooh, I can't think why the makers aren't satisfied with us as we

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are," he whiffled; "air-cooling, indeed! it never has succeeded and never will. What's the automobile world coming to in these days of experiments with queer-looking spring-wheels, and all sorts of radical horrors? Give me a good honeycomb radiator and pneumatics, say I, with a gear-driven pump and a litre or two of water; I don't ask more."

Evidently I was expected to retort; and if I had there might have been a collision next day; but, after all I had gone through, such squabbling for the sake of petty jealousy seemed infinitely trivial, and I did not even trouble myself to answer. Indeed, I pretended to have gone to sleep in the midst of his speech; and presently all the other motors—most of whom felt the need of resting for the morrow—followed my example.

Potin was evidently anxious to please the Prince, his master, for he appeared early at the garage on the morning after our arrival at Monte Carlo. He was happy, whistling as he worked—maybe he would whistle for his money, by and by!—prying conscientiously about for dirt and grit, visiting every crevice and corner with a velvety piece of new chamois leather, filling up my tank with cool petrol, strained through a delicate sieve, and stuffing my gear-box with the best quality of grease, suitable to the car of a touring prince. He drew off from my crank-chamber all the

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dirty oil that had accumulated there and would have spoiled my temper for the day, if it had been left, and soothed my feelings with a generous supply of the finest lubricating-oil such as I had begun to look for when I saw the tins, and to be discontented if I didn't get. As far as treatment was concerned, apparently I was not to have much to complain of. Adventurer as my new owner was, he was not bad enough to expect a car to do its best when whirling its crank-head round in a mess of gritty oil, dashing the stuff up into the cylinders, scoring their surfaces, perhaps, and losing compression. I was grateful to him for that; and I said to myself, "After all, it isn't my business if my oil and petrol, or even my chauffeur's work, is never paid for."

When Potin had overhauled me thoroughly there certainly was not as smart-looking a car in the big garage; and, though I myself objected to my changed appearance, there was some slight solace in finding it superior to that of others—others who thought themselves perfection. Just as Potin had set my motor going, and I had begun to purr with a sense of physical well-being which triumphed momentarily over gloomy memories, the Princess' maid appeared, looking piquant and attractive.

She had been sent out on an errand, it appeared—to buy some gloves of a certain shade for her mistress

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—and, as it was scarcely out of the way, she had dropped in at the garage to say good morning to Monsieur Potin.

“You were not at breakfast, poor young man!” she exclaimed.

“No,” said he, “the car was wanted early. I wouldn’t let her go out in an unworthy condition. I have my pride, as you have. Would you not be ashamed to recognize Madame in the street, if you hadn’t done her hair properly? Eh bien, it is the same thing.”

Thérèse chuckled at this, and pinched Potin’s arm, whereupon Potin pulled her ear; and I saw that their friendship had grown a good deal in the last twenty-four hours. Thérèse told him of a breakfast conversation she had had with the maid of a certain Austrian Countess and the valet of the Count. Evidently all had made acquaintance the night before, at dinner, perhaps, and Potin did not seem surprised to hear that the new friends wished to have a spin with “his car.”

“Say that I will take her and her fiancé the first day that we have this happy combination; Monsieur le Prince not wishing to go out, and Madame la Princesse not needing the services of Mademoiselle Thérèse,” replied Potin gallantly. And I realized that, good chauffeur as he might be, he was not above deceiving his master. This mattered little to me, how-

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ever. I had none of the loyalty for Fanning that I had for my one true Master, and I did not worry my crank-head about any tricks that might be played upon him.

Thérèse did not stop more than five minutes, as she dared not keep her mistress waiting too long for the gloves. Potin promised to give her time for her errand before he arrived with me at the hotel; and, true to his word, Thérèse was just hurrying in at the door when we drew up before it, with a magnificent curve. Early as it still was, the Prince and Princess must have been in the great hall, for almost immediately they came out, very well dressed and prosperous-looking, the Princess drawing on the pale gray gloves her maid had just brought in.

She sat with her husband on the front seat, Potin relegated to the tonneau, and they talked together in English, a language of which they had already carefully ascertained that the chauffeur knew not one word.

"We must hurry with our errands," said Fanning, "or the Ruggles will be down. I don't want them to know we've been out to the shops together before taking them."

"The shopkeepers may give us away," answered Marie.

"Not they. I'll see to that. They'll recognize me

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with a bow, of course, but it will seem that they remember me from another season, when I was here *en garcon*. As for you, you will not go into any of the jewelers with me this morning. I will drop you at the milliner's and call for you afterward."

"We needn't have waited for the car. We could have walked, and started earlier," said Marie.

"My child! You're still an amateur. Don't you understand that the shopkeepers must *see* the car? It's our principal stock-in-trade—our background. A yacht would be better—a yacht anchored in the Bay of Hercules. We'd give parties on board; royal highnesses and dukes would come to tea every day. But never mind—that's the next item on our program. We must make the best of what we have for the present; and it strikes me we aren't beginning badly. Now, what do you say to this Magasin de Confections? Is it smart enough for you?"

"Oh, what divine hats and dresses!" breathed Marie.

Her Prince brought me to a standstill in front of a shop whose windows were attractive enough to dazzle a real Princess.

"Order a hat," said Fanning, as Potin got down to help the Princess to descend. "Tell them to send round a lot of things to the hotel for you to try on afterward—things you think Mrs. Ruggles would like. Say you want a friend to see some of them as well as

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yourself. Make Mrs. Ruggles fit herself out from this shop, and after that they'll be only too thankful to you for running up as big a bill as you please. If you should happen to forget to pay when you go, you needn't worry; the Ruggles' purchases will have more than recouped them; places like this always charge treble prices, so the people who do pay, pay for those who don't."

Marie disappeared behind a glass door which was obsequiously opened for her, and we went on, across the big *Place* in front of the Casino. There we drew up again in front of a shop like a palace of glass, blazing with gems; tiaras; crowns; stomachers; belts of brilliants; life-size diamond snakes with ruby or emerald heads; bags, big and little, of gold netting fringed and patterned with jewels, or shaped like owls, or rabbits, with precious stones for eyes; cases of rings; ropes of pearl; collar and necklaces like shimmering rivers of electric light. It was a wonderful show, and must mean countless thousands of pounds. My cylinders grew a little hotter than they ought to have been as I wondered how many thousands of those pounds I should be forced to carry away. Built as I had been for honor and not for shame, I felt that, if my real Master passed me now, I should drop to pieces with mortification.

At sight of a client driving up in a fine car thus late



"HE ACCOMPANIED HIS CLIENT . . . TO THE EDGE OF THE
PAVEMENT."

(p. 223.)

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in the season, the unwary proprietor rushed to open the door. The Prince walked in with an air, Potin standing cap in hand, as the servant of so grand a personage should do.

Soon, I saw a hand selecting jewels from the window; a splendid diamond necklace, and a two-yard-long rope of huge glistening pearls were withdrawn. Later a case of rings followed; a gold bag; three or four jeweled bangles, and a dog-collar of brilliants.

"Is the shopman going to be such a fool as to let a stranger walk off with his things, just because he happens to have a big, red motor-car and a smart chauffeur?" I wondered in contemptuous pity. But, whatever the Prince's game was, I had not fathomed it yet. He came out presently without the jewels; yet the shopkeeper seemed far from disappointed. He accompanied his client not only to the door, but to the edge of the pavement, thanking him profusely for his "kind promises."

"Just keep those things until I can bring the Princess in to see them, or until she is going to be at home, and I can have them sent round," said Fanning, "privately, you know. I don't want my Australian friends to think me selfish, in coming to take the pick of your windows for my wife, before they have a chance to look in; still, one naturally desires the pleasure of one's own wife before that of other women."

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"But certainly, Monsieur le Prince. The jewels I have laid aside will not be spoken of or shown when you are so gracious to my establishment as to bring your friends. I was most stupid not to have remembered your highness at first sight from—two seasons ago you say it was?—but it is only the fault of my poor eyes, which are not so strong."

Now I began to see into the mystery, and to respect my owner's cleverness as I respected no other of his qualities! We turned grandly from the door and presently stopped before another magnificent jewelry shop, two streets farther away.

There the same thing happened; beautiful things were withdrawn from the window, the proprietor followed his noble customer out, and almost the very words of his predecessor were repeated.

"*Le cher Prince* isn't going to trust all his eggs to one basket," I said to myself, recalling a proverb I had heard the miserable Arnaud quote in old days.

After this second visit, we returned to the milliner's where we had left our Princess; and, though we must have been gone some time, she did not appear impatient. She was enraptured with what she had seen, and said that half a dozen "perfectly adorable" hats, blouses, and frocks were to be sent over for her and Mrs. Ruggles to select from, in the afternoon.

"That's all right," chuckled Fanning. "She'll take

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anything you tell her is becoming—she has no taste of her own, and any amount of confidence in yours; aren't you a Princess? My affairs marched well, too—exactly as we planned, or better. I tell you we're going to make a big haul soon—or break in the attempt. But we won't break—not yet, anyhow. We have *la veine* with us, and it's going to last a while—I feel it. Are you happy, little woman?"

"Awfully!" cried Marie, "in a wild, desperate way, as if I'd been drinking too much champagne."

"Anyhow, champagne's better than the dark river, eh?"

"Oh, don't speak of it. I've only to think of that, to be half-mad with enjoyment of everything. This is life—life—life!"

And then, we were turning in among the palms and roses of the hotel garden. The Prince and Princess went in, and Potin stood waiting. Once, he looked at his watch, and I was able to see that it was only a few minutes past ten—early still, especially for Monte Carlo. Half an hour passed, and once more my new owner and his bride appeared, this time bringing with them the Ruggles.

I supposed that we were now bound for a return visit to the jewelers; but not at all. We were going for a simple, innocent drive, and no doubt the Australians were more than pleased to show themselves to the

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gay world in such distinguished society. In a few minutes we had flashed to Cap Martin, and on to the pretty little town of Mentone set in its half-ring of mountains; then back again along the curving white road to Monte Carlo.

“Now you’ve had an airing, would you like to shop for an hour, before finishing up the morning with a stroll through the Casino?” asked the Prince of his guests.

Of course they were delighted, as they would have been with any proposal of his highness!

“What about the diamonds I heard my wife say you were wanting to choose?” he suggested to Mrs. Ruggles. “Perhaps I flatter myself too much, but I do think I am something of a connoisseur in the matter of pearls and diamonds, perhaps of emeralds and rubies as well; I don’t say of anything else, though my eye for sapphires isn’t bad. Still, there are my specialties; and, at least, I’ve had some experience. My mother was one of the greatest buyers of her day, and I chose everything for her. If you would care for my help in selecting—but, perhaps, Mr. Ruggles knows as much as I do—or more?”

The infatuated husband and wife protested loudly. Both were as ignorant of such matters as babies; but, said Mr. Ruggles, they wanted the best, and plenty of it, for they could afford to have it. And what they

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wanted most was for their dear, kind Prince and Princess to choose for them.

"My wife is a child. She knows nothing of jewels, but she has taste in their arrangement," said the Prince loftily. "For herself, she does not need to buy—unless she fancies some novelty. She has my family heirlooms, or will have them. I do not let her travel about with the Vasiliévna jewels. Here, Mr. Ruggles, is one of the two best shops in Monte Carlo; afterward I will take you to the other."

The pair of birds hopped into the big glass cage as tamely as if they had salt on their tails. This time, my position in front of the shop was rather more advantageous, and I could see what was going on inside. I saw the Princess and Mrs. Ruggles bending in admiration over the counter, while the Prince pointed out this or that, or pushed some jewel aside. A long string of diamonds was looped across the Australian lady's ample bosom, a flexible tiara was held against her hair. She pulled off her gloves and squeezed over her fat fingers, already loaded with ugly but expensive stones, new and beautiful rings praised by the Prince. At last Mr. Ruggles was called into consultation; out from his pocket came a stout wallet of leather, and out of the wallet came a thick sheaf of notes.

The party were in the shop almost long enough to

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buy half its contents, it seemed; but at last they finished and came to me, followed by a young employee carrying a large box wrapped in white paper. In this, no doubt, were the jewel-cases, which Mrs. Ruggles was childishly anxious to bring away with her immediately.

"Now, when we come to the place where I'm going to take you next," explained the Prince, "you will understand why I said nothing about pearls in this shop. Of course, no woman's jewel-box is complete nowadays without a really perfect string of pearls, even if she does not care for a rope to wear when *en grande toilette*. The string you have at present is striking, but—if you allow me to say so—I think you owe it to yourself to have another more evenly matched in shape and color."

Again the birds were caged, and—judging from what I heard when they returned to me—must have picked up pearls like so many canary-seeds.

By this time, the Princess decided, it was too late for the Casino before luncheon. She was, she said, a little tired, but when the Australian millionaire invited the Prince to name the most fashionable restaurant in Monte Carlo, and to lunch there at his expense, she brightened.

"I would suggest *Ciro's*, and a table on the terrace," replied the Prince airily. No doubt his plan was car-

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ried out; but as the party had first to go back to the hotel to dispose of the valuable new purchases, and I was sent to the garage, I had no further personal knowledge of their movements for several hours.

In the cool of the afternoon, however, I was taken out again for a run up to La Turbie. This time there was a third guest, an anemic but rich-looking young man, who had evidently been selected as another likely victim. I won much praise by the manner in which I took the hills which had to be climbed, and turned the sharp corners. My passengers had tea, and I had petrol at La Turbie; and during the run down most of the talk was of the oil-wells on Prince Vasiliévna's estates in Russia!

"My gentleman isn't wasting any of his opportunities," I said to myself, and, really, his maneuvers were clever. He did not seem at all eager to let these new friends of his into the good thing which he had in his hand. They were so anxious for a chance, however, that finding hints useless, the new man—whose name was Boyle-Smythe—and Ruggles begged that the Prince would, if he were disposing of any among his own shares, give them the first opportunity to become buyers. At last he said that he would do so, and the Princess laughingly exclaimed that it was like the good nature for which she had married him.

Next day, when Potin was getting me ready to go

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out, about ten o'clock in the morning, the Prince walked into the garage. I noticed, the instant I caught sight of him, that he was pale, with a feverish brightness of the eyes.

"You needn't come with me this morning, Potin," said he; and, though he spoke in a low tone which tried to be calm, his voice was not as steady as usual. "I want the car only for a short run," he went on, "and, as I may pick up a party of friends whom I've half-promised to take out, it will be a convenience to have one more place."

"*Très bien*, Monsieur," replied the chauffeur, happy in the thought of a holiday, and entirely unsuspecting. But in my cylinders hummed the question: "Is the game up already?"

I expected to be taken to the hotel for Marie, when she did not arrive at the garage before the start; but Fanning drove me past the entrance to the garden, straight ahead up the hill, turning to the right into the Boulevard des Moulins. Then, when we had gone on for a short distance, I was put round another turn and bidden to mount a steep gradient. We had passed out of the gay and beautiful part of Monte Carlo, the part best known to pleasure-seekers, and I began to wonder if it were possible that the man meant to give his young wife the slip. Somehow, I could not believe that of him, bad as he was; but the expedition

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was certainly mysterious, and I could have told by the touch of his hand on my steering-wheel, even if I hadn't known before, that he was deeply agitated.

Suddenly Fanning slowed me down; and, stopping at a turn of the road, he said to a cloaked and veiled woman, who stood as if waiting: "Well—*well?*"

"It's all right," answered the voice of Marie, though the figure did not look like Marie's; and I puffed out a petrolic sigh of relief; for I had a sneaking weakness for the little woman, and I would have burst my tires sooner than desert her.

"Get in," said Fanning, "and tell me all about it. I'll drive round a bit, out of the way of people. First—how much did they give you on the jewels?"

"Exactly a thousand pounds," answered the girl, on the seat beside him now. "They wanted me to take eight hundred, but I wouldn't. Then I kept screwing them up, till finally I got the thousand; and I'd been so long bargaining that I didn't dare try for anything better, though I know you expected at least a hundred pounds more."

"You've done very well, my little pigeon," said Fanning.

"I didn't know that going to a pawn-shop could be so horrid," groaned Marie. "They weren't rude exactly, but—they looked at me in such a hateful way, and they were so nonchalant. I was glad I had a veil.

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But in spite of it, and this cloak that nobody here has seen, I was in the most dreadful fright. I thought, what if the jewelers suspected us, and had detectives in their pay who had followed me over the frontier to the pawn-shop? I expected every minute to be arrested."

"Poor, little silly child, it's a shame you had to suffer all that torture," said Fanning kindly. "But I couldn't see you through it. You had to do the thing by yourself, just as I've got to do what comes next by myself. You're supposed to be shut up in your room with a cold, amusing yourself by examining the jewels which our grateful and trusting friends have sent for the Princess Vasiliévna to select from. It's all right if *I'm* seen—I've nothing to do with it. I told both the jeweler chaps that I didn't want to influence your choice—I should keep out of the way till you had decided."

"If they should see us now!" she breathed.

"They won't. But if they did, they'd think only that the Prince was taking a strange lady out for a drive, while the poor little Princess kept her bed with a cold. You look twice the Princess' size!"

"I'm so thankful. I slipped out of the hotel very cleverly. Thérèse thinks I have some secret from you; I *wanted* her to think it—that sort of thing appeals to a Frenchwoman; and I gave her a blouse as a

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bribe to help me. Oh, if those jeweler men knew that instead of selecting which of their things I should buy, I'd *pawned every one of them!*"

"It's only for a few hours. We have all time to play with. Both men understand that they're not to send for the jewels till one o'clock. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile! Ah, that's the awful part! *If you fail?*"

"I sha'n't fail. I feel that luck is going to stand by my side at the Casino to-day, and tell me what to back. Give me the money, dear, and then trot home to the hotel."

CHAPTER XVII.

I Am Initiated into Certain Mysteries.

Marie was on the point of crying. "Go home!" she echoed. "I couldn't bear the suspense. I should die, left alone between four walls, while you were making our fortune—or wrecking it. Can't I go with you to the Casino?"

"Not possible. They wouldn't let you into the rooms veiled like that; and you know very well that the Princess Vasiliévna is at home, choosing some jewels."

"Thérèse wouldn't give me away if any one inquired. She'd say I was sleeping off a headache and couldn't be disturbed."

"You musn't be seen, anyhow. I'm going to take the car round to the garage, and then——"

"If I can't be with you, for goodness' sake let Potin drive me about and keep me going, every instant, in the open air, till you're ready to come out. Then we'll call for you."

"Very well. In half an hour our fates will be decided. I'm going to gamble for our whole future, my girl. Thirty minutes will be enough to make us—or lose us."

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"In half an hour after you enter the Casino doors, then, Potin and I will be back with the car." Marie's voice was hoarse. She had to moisten her lips to speak clearly.

Fanning must have known that, as he had given Potin leave, the chauffeur was more than likely to be away. Probably he wished to save himself the pain of refusing Marie; but, as luck would have it, we found Potin still at the garage, talking eagerly to an English chauffeur, with whom he had struck up a friendship since yesterday evening. The Englishman could speak enough French to exchange ideas with Potin, and Potin could help him with some of the technical words connected with motoring, of which he was ignorant.

My chauffeur was not too pleased, evidently, at having me thrown back on his hands so quickly. Probably he cursed himself for not leaving the garage as soon as my back was turned; but it was now too late for regrets, and with a good enough grace he obeyed his orders to take Madame la Princesse out for a short spin.

They dropped the Prince at the Casino, and poor Marie looked after him wistfully, as her husband disappeared into the wide, open doorway; but he did not turn. He walked straight in, with head erect, and his shoulders thrown back.

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"Drive me to Monaco," said Marie, "and wait at the Cathedral. I wish to go in for a moment."

Potin did as he was told, and stopped under the steps of the Cathedral. Marie went up slowly, as if she could hardly control her limbs, and her veiled head was drooping. She was a selfish little adventuress, preying upon the world, and her hopes for the future were founded upon cheating others; yet I should not be surprised if she spent her time in the Cathedral praying for Fanning's success at the Casino, praying hard, without realizing that she and her prayers were alike incongruous.

She was not gone more than ten minutes, and the half-hour was not nearly up yet; but she was too restless to keep away from the Casino longer. She told Potin to take her down quickly to the *Place*, lest the Prince should come out and be waiting.

I bowled them along gaily, for I had my own curiosity; but when we arrived before the Casino door Fanning was not to be seen; and presently we were obliged to move on and make room for a dusty old automobile that would not have dared to address me of its own accord.

Potin drew me up in front of the Hotel de Paris; and if the minutes which passed before Fanning came out of the Casino seemed long to me, they must have seemed doubly so to Marie. She moved about in her

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seat and sighed, starting every time a man in a gray suit could be seen in the doorway across the *Place*. Then, at last, he appeared running down the steps, walking fast toward me, his face as white as if it had been chalked, and his eyes as bright as if he were burning up with fever. Whatever had happened, however the luck had gone, it was plain that he was keyed to the highest pitch of excitement. I could not guess from his face whether he had won, or whether he was hurrying to say that not an instant must be lost in getting outside the Principality.

Marie could not speak, but sat still, her face turned toward him.

"Keep your seat, Potin," said the Prince, moistening his lips. "I want you to drive." He opened the door of the tonneau, and Marie, whisking out of her place on to the front seat, flashed in behind, that she might be by her husband's side and learn her fate without delay.

"Where would Monsieur have me drive?" inquired Potin.

"Anywhere," answered the Prince, with the air of not knowing what he said. "I want a little air—that's all. Go anywhere."

So Potin turned me toward the Condamine, and up to Monaco again, where the road was less choked with traffic than the streets of Monte Carlo.

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"Tell me—everything," faltered Marie.

"Just one minute to breathe, and I will," replied Fanning, inhaling deep drafts of air. "Heavens! What a half-hour! I came down to the last louis."

"The last louis!" she gasped. "The last out of a thousand pounds!"

"Yes. Wait. Let me begin at the beginning. I never went through anything quite like it. You know, it wasn't as if I were alone, as I used to be. I had you to think of. I kept seeing your face, as it would look if——"

"Oh, *don't!* Tell me—what happened."

"I stopped at the first table I came to. Something seemed to say, 'This is the one!' I told you I felt luck would be with me. I was in a mood to be superstitious—to obey the Voice—or fancy. I had the greatest confidence in my inspiration to do the right thing. I played without hesitation. But—all my calculations were wrong: whatever I turned to do the whole force of the roulette seemed to pit itself against me. None of the numbers I covered came out. It was enough for me to back a dozen or a column for it to fail to appear, ten times in succession. On simple chances it was the same. If I played for runs there came intermittances, or vice versa. I grew hot and cold. I could no longer think. It looked as if the end had come for you and me. But I made one more effort and pulled

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myself together. I thought if I could win once, we might at least get out of Monte Carlo. I hoped for nothing more than that, then—for there was but the one louis left. A light seemed to flash through my brain, and black against the illumination I saw the word 'Zero.' I knew that Zero would come. It was as if I controlled the ball as it left the croupier's hand. I had meant to separate the last louis into four five-franc stakes, but I flung the one gold coin on Zero. Zero it was! I was paid thirty-five louis. The prudent thing would have been to go away with the money, thankful for something out of the wreck, or at least to play only with small stakes. But now the two words 'Quatre premiers' were printed black against the light before my eyes. I risked the whole money, therefore, on Quatre premiers. 'Deux; noir, impair et manque,' announced the croupier. When I picked up my stake and winnings I was three hundred and fifteen louis to the good. This took me so long that there was only just time to try my luck again before the warning cry of 'Rien n'va plus.' I dashed down the maximum—nine louis—*en plein* on thirty-six, twenty-five louis on the trois derniers, one hundred louis on the last dozen, and all I had left on red. I was but just in time. The ball fell into thirty-six, and, as every one had been watching this last play of mine, there was a murmur from the whole table.

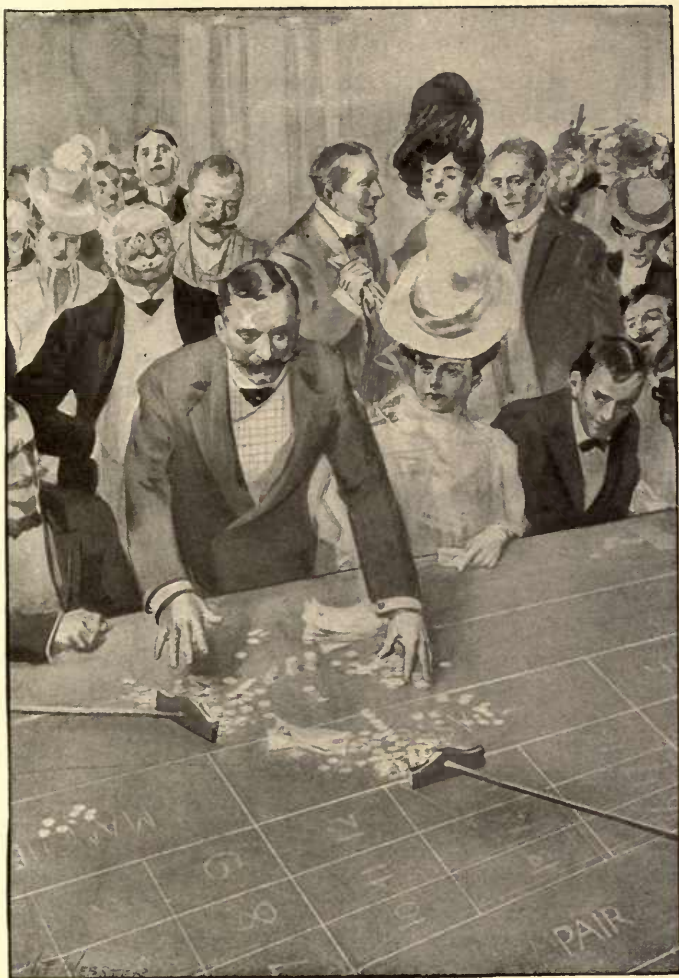
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'Même jeu,' I said. I think something must have burst in my brain if I had lost, and you would have been a widow all in a moment; but thirty-six came up again. This time every one exclaimed, and people ran from other tables to see what made the excitement.

"I was over two thousand five hundred louis to the good, and all from that one, last louis. Still, the fortune I'd come to try for wasn't yet made, and I was not satisfied. 'Follow your luck once more,' the Voice said. 'Même jeu,' I heard myself repeating. It was as if the Voice spoke, not I. The croupier helped me stake. Thirty-four came up: almost as good for me as if it had been thirty-six for the third time. Suddenly I felt a kind of inward collapse. There was no more inspiration. My hands trembled so that I could hardly pick up my winnings. I was afraid my knees would give under me as I came away. My Princess, we're over two thousand seven hundred English sovereigns richer than we were when I went into the rooms; and when the jewels are redeemed we'll still have nearly two thousand pounds of our own. What do you think of that?"

"Think of it!" Marie gasped. "It's wonderful—but terrible. Only to listen has turned me to ice, and then set me on fire. We're saved, and we're rich—rich!"

"Not rich; but we've enough to go on with till I bring off another coup. Don't be frightened. I sha'n't



"'I COULD HARDLY PICK UP MY WINNINGS.'"

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risk our all again. The Australians and Boyle-Smith and two or three others will be handing me their checks for the oil shares soon. But now what we've got to think of is to bring back the jewels. I'll stop Potin at the top of the same street as before, and you must pluck up courage to walk into the lion's den again to redeem the things. They won't be surprised to see you back so soon. And you needn't be surprised if they smile and congratulate you on your good luck. They'll know you've been at the tables."

He gave her money, which they counted over together. The chauffeur was told where to go, and where to stop, as Madame wished to descend. We did not wait, as she wished to slip into the hotel unnoticed, in the same way as she had slipped out; but I doubted not that everything had gone well, for in the afternoon I was called upon to take a large party to Beaulieu for tea, and both Prince and Princess were in the best of spirits. I observed also that Mrs. Ruggles was wearing a new string of pearls round her neck, while a huge diamond was screwed on to each one of her rather prominent ears, and she carried a gold bag with a fringe of sapphires. From this I judged that some, at least, of the famous jewels had been purchased, and that the Prince's credit was of the best with the trusting shopkeepers.

For the next few days I was kept busy in carrying

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the Prince and Princess with their friends—there were relays of new faces each day—all over the beautiful country which lies round Monte Carlo. Often I ran with a full load, yet with no effort, up to La Turbie, where my hospitable owner would entertain his guests at luncheon in the Oriental restaurant overlooking the splendid view of the Mediterranean coast. Then we would sometimes dash on to the queer little village of Laghet, and down to Nice; or we would twist up the wild road to Sospel; or fly over the Italian frontiers as far as San Remo. All this I enjoyed—or would have enjoyed if I had not been ceaselessly thinking of my real Master—for the roads were good and the scenery splendid. I could not help being interested, too, in as much as I could understand of the drama in which Paul Fanning and Mary Precious were the leading characters.

When they and their guests were not talking of oil-wells they were gabbling about the gambling at Monte Carlo, and after some days of this the technical terms in the games of roulette and trente et quarante became almost as familiar to me as the names of my own parts. They were continually telling anecdotes of “runs” they had “been on” or “just missed,” of grand coups they had seen or made, and one morning Paul was in a particularly good humor, for all the others were congratulating him on a brilliant performance

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the evening before. It appeared that he had begun by staking the "maximum" on red at trente et quarante, and had won no less than nine times in succession, when he had coolly picked up all the mass of notes and played no more, thus keeping the whole of his great winnings.

He passed his stroke of fortune off with a smile. "That sort of thing is so easy, with plenty of money and a little pluck to let your stake lie. Thank Heaven, I've never been a poor man, and now this oil has been discovered on my estates, it would amuse me to have a really serious battle with the Casino—something *worth* bringing off. Try a system I've been thinking out, employ several professional players, providing them with a practically unbreakable capital, and give them a chance to break the bank. With my little system I believe it could be done day after day."

These were words of wisdom, because they were the words of a Prince who was also a millionaire; so his sycophantic friends hung upon them, and begged that a syndicate might be made up for the grand experiment, as they all wanted to come in. The Prince demurred, then consented, laughingly, and I was certain that the scheme would be arranged.

We had been at Monte Carlo for a fortnight when one day Paul told his chauffeur that, as he was giving a big luncheon-party at his hotel, and a dinner in the

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evening, I should not be needed at all, and Potin could have a holiday. This was what he and Thérèse had waited and hoped for. Their friends' master and mistress were now among the friends of the Prince and Princess Vasiliévna, so they were among the guests invited to one or both of the two entertainments, and the servants could get off for a run in the middle of the day.

The luncheon was at one o'clock; and as soon as it was sure that the party was safely assembled, the start was made. We had not only the valet and maid to whom Thérèse and Potin had taken a fancy, but the English chauffeur whom they had lately picked up as an acquaintance. His master was ill, and he was free for the day, a fact which was to mean much for me and my whole future in more ways than one.

He was a swaggering fellow who impressed me as knowing very little about his work, though he put on the airs of an expert, and boasted that he had never seen a car which he could not drive at sight. I had a dislike to him, and hoped he would not want to try his hand on me; but after my passengers had stopped for lunch, a dance and a game of bowls at a common country restaurant over the Italian border, he expressed a wish to sit on the front seat beside Potin on the way home.

This annoyed me, for I thought it was the first step

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toward a suggestion that he should drive; but for the time he seemed to have no such thought in his mind. He contented himself with talking of his powers, and I pricked up my valves when he announced that a couple of years ago he had been chauffeur to "the great Barr-Simons."

Whether this statement were true, or made only to impress Potin, he appeared to know a good deal about the man of whom he spoke. Soon the talk turned to the Vandervoort Surprise Cup race, and the Englishman asked Potin if he had been there. Reluctantly Potin confessed that he had not, but expressed interest, and the other chauffeur proceeded to describe it in execrable French. Now, little as I liked the fellow, I was thankful to have him as a passenger, and in my eagerness for news of my Master, I ran slackly, losing power.

"What became of the young Englishman?" asked Potin. "The chap whose car would have won if it hadn't come to grief?"

I misfired twice in my anxiety for the answer.

"Oh, he never had a chance with Barr-Simons," replied the other so contemptuously that I would have pitched him out if I had had him on board alone. "That was all a mistake. But the fellow—his name was Cameron—is getting well, you know. Every one expected him to die, even his own sister, who it seems

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is the only person in his family who has been looking after him. He must have been a black sheep, I suppose, for the story is—I think Barr-Simons knew and talked about it—the story is that he did something which forced his father, a parson and rather a swell, to throw him over, years ago. But the sister was visiting some one in France, for the motor-race—perhaps it was Mrs. Barr-Simons herself. Anyhow, she nursed her brother, and quite a romance has grown out of that affair. Vandervorst, the American millionaire, saw her, and fell in love, so he either took or pretended to take an interest in Cameron, hanging about the hospital, making inquiries, sending fruit, and all that sort of thing. He's a newspaper man himself, but the news of what he was doing got into every other paper except his own. That one carefully lay low and didn't say a word till it announced his engagement to Miss Cameron, only a day or two ago."

My Master getting well; Sheila engaged to the rich Mr. Vandervorst! Here was news indeed; but there was more to come.

"I met Cameron's chauffeur in London, just after the accident," the Englishman went on. "He was a Frenchman, but had lived in England, and talked English pretty well. He said Cameron had a fit and lost control of his car in the race. He'd been working too hard. Arnaud the chap's name was."

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"Why do you 'was'?" asked Potin. "Or is that only because you have not much French grammar yet?"

"I say 'was,' because he's dead now," replied the other calmly. "Wasn't it in the French papers? I should have thought it would be. I found it in Vandervoorst's own paper, the day I told you of, when I saw the engagement announced. Quaint—the two bits of news should have been in the same issue. Arnaud was very flush of money when I met him, and seemed to be spending it all on a pretty music-hall singer, a French girl who had been popular in London for the last year or so. She let him spend; and then, it seems, ran away with a Spaniard, an ex-bull-fighter, who's retired with a fortune—a handsome, gipsy-looking chap. I saw him in a box applauding her new song one night; just the sort of man to attract a woman like that. 'La Belle 'Toinette,' as they call her, broke all her engagements and popped off with the Spaniard on his yacht, bound for South America or somewhere. I thought of Arnaud when I read she'd gone; and then I saw, four or five days later, that the body of a man unknown who threw himself from Waterloo Bridge, had been identified as that of the mechanic and chauffeur, Jean Arnaud."

I had not a thrill of compassion for the dead man, when I heard this; not the rise of a fraction of a de-

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gree in the heat of my cylinders. He was a coward and a traitor, and I was not sorry that he had died a death only fit for such a man as he. And so, an end of Arnaud! I didn't believe there was a soul in the world to regret him; unless my Master, in the generosity of his heart, forgave and pitied. My metal wasn't tempered for such nobility as that, though I believed myself to be made of true steel and stanch iron.

So lost was I in thoughts of the past, that for some moments I became deaf to all that followed, and was only recalled to the present when I found Potin and his friend changing places. The Englishman was going to drive me!

I was sure that, if Potin had not taken a little too much red wine of the country, he would not have allowed this, for he was proud of me, and in his way loyal enough to his master's interests. In a normal mood he would have put his friend off, and refused to run risks; but he had danced and he had drunk; he was good-natured and afraid of nothing, so he gave the wheel to the Englishman, and the thing I expected happened. The strange chauffeur, for all his boasting, had never laid hands upon a car of my sort, and he was like a keeper of tame leopards thrown among lions.

I gave a preliminary wobble, as a warning, for I did not want to hurt any of my passengers if I could

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help it. If he had had any sense, he would have changed speeds, for I was going at a good pace when he attempted to take charge of me. But he paid no heed, and the best I could do was to dash myself with as little force as possible against the wall of rock by the side of the road.

I didn't throw any one out, except the Englishman himself, and that was only justice. Besides, it did him good, and he got up after a sobering fall, limping, and bleeding from the forehead, altogether a wiser if sadder man. As for the other guests, they got no more than a shock from being flung all in a heap in the tonneau, and knocking their heads together. But Potin had a handful of broken glass in his face, and was ready to cry with pain and shame of what he had done, to say nothing of his dread of the consequences.

As for me, not only had I smashed my new front glass—that I didn't regret, for I hated it—but had crumpled up my fine bonnet, and bent my steering-rods, so that it was a long and difficult matter to get me back to the garage. Thérèse and the three guests all went home by rail from Ventigmilia, lest they should be wanted by their employers before they could reach Monte Carlo by car; and Potin, left alone with me, made me crawl like a wounded animal along the road.

To do him justice he did not think as much about

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his own injuries as he did about mine, over which he groaned dismally. But then, of course, it was not all unselfishness. He was in a fever lest the Prince should ask for me in the morning, before I could be repaired, and he would have to confess that he had taken me out without leave. He dismounted my steering-gear and rushed off with it and my damaged bonnet, hoping no doubt that by working all night, he might in spite of everything have me in good trim again by morning.

It had been about eight o'clock and dusk, when we returned; and after a couple of restless hours I had tried to forget a few inward aches and pains by dropping into a doze, when I was awakened suddenly by the voice of the Prince. He and the Princess were together, and must have come into the garage almost noiselessly, or I should have heard them, for, as I have said, I generally sleep with one or two valves open.

The pair were talking together in low, agitated tones, and the Princess was trying to conceal a small dressing-bag under her long motoring-cloak.

"Good heavens, the car's smashed!" stammered the Prince. "What devilish luck—on this night of all others!" and he glanced round, as if he would have asked a question. But there were no chauffeurs about—only the helpers in charge of the garage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I Lose My Temper.

"What can have happened—and what shall we do?" almost sobbed Marie.

"I could choke Potin! He's had the car out, and smashed it. Now he's sneaked off with the steering-gear, and the thing can't move."

"What will become of us?" faltered the girl.

"We'll have to go off without the car, that's all," said Paul moodily.

"What—leave it forever? Never see it again?"

"Just so. There's nothing else for it."

"Couldn't we—wait till to-morrow?" suggested Marie timidly.

"What, and run the risk of being caught? It isn't like you to want that. I tell you, I'm all but certain Barr-Simons recognized me as I passed the table where he was playing, in the *trente et quarante* room. He looked round—our eyes met. His expression changed."

"But you look so different. He can't have been sure it was you, even if he suspected."

"Barr-Simons' suspicions are more dangerous than other men's certainties. He made no great fuss about

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his garage being burnt, for he didn't want Cameron's car talked about; he preferred people not to know it was there, lest the story should get round that he started the fire himself, to get rid of a rival's invention. But he was furious all the same—no doubt of that—losing his car and the other as well. He must have thought of me, that night; and when they had dug about in the débris days after, and discovered that Cameron's car wasn't destroyed, but gone, I'd bet all I've made and lost at Monte Carlo that he thought of me again. He may have tracked me easily, as far as Nîmes, who knows but farther? He's a demon—Barr-Simons; the only man I was ever afraid of. At this moment I'll bet he's making inquiries, getting my description, getting my name and address, beginning to ferret out things. By to-morrow he'll have a telegram from St. Petersburg to say that the Prince Vasilévna is at home on his estates, and the game will be up. I'm no coward—no prophet of evil, Marie, but I know that man; and I felt recognition in his look."

"If we must go, we must," sighed the ex-Princess, "but I've grown so fond of the poor car, I hate leaving it. It's too sad."

"I hate it too—I hate the whole business," said Paul. "But needs must when the devil drives—or Barr-Simons. Don't cry. You shall have a yacht, next thing."

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"But we've only a thousand pounds left," she murmured; "only a thousand out of it all. Oh, if you hadn't played to-night!"

"If it hadn't been for Barr-Simons, I should have gone on to another table, won back all my losses, and made a big pile besides, I know it. But he threw his evil eye on me, and—*sauve qui peut!* Anyhow, we came here with nothing; we've lived in luxury for weeks; we've paid Nicolas; we go away with a thousand pounds and a gold-fitted bag, full of jewelry."

"To think of all my beautiful dresses hanging in the wardrobe, and I can't take them with me!" moaned Marie.

"You've got on a beauty, covered with a hundred pounds worth of lace, under your cloak. Be thankful for that—and that I gave you the chance to slip into your room to pick up the jewelry. It was a great risk; if you'd met your maid——"

"I knew she was in bed. She seemed ill before dinner, and complained of a headache."

(I was not surprised to hear this. If her head had not been hard, the ache might have been worse.)

"All's well that ends well; and we needn't complain. We're in luck that the last train for the night hasn't gone."

"Where are we to go in it?" Marie inquired dolefully.

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"We must go to Ventimiglia; there's none the other way now. I don't know the connections farther on—I've no Italian time-table. But somehow, we shall get somewhere, never fear; and it doesn't matter since we shall escape Barr-Simons. The Prince and Princess Vasiliévna cease to exist, as far as we are concerned, from this moment."

"If we could have waited till to-morrow, you'd have had all the System Syndicate money in—ten thousand pounds."

"Never mind, there are as good fish in the sea, somewhere else, as those we have to drop off our hooks here. And now to find them. We'll take a cab to Mentone. I don't want to get into a train at Monte Carlo station, in case B.-S. is already on the watch."

"Good-by, dear car," said Marie mournfully. "Good-by forever!"

So the pair went out of my sight, and out of my life. I could not help regretting them, and wishing them luck in spite of their sins against society! If it had not been for them, Barr-Simons would have had me, and to aid them in escaping from him I would have done my best, if I had not been *hors de combat*.

I did not see any one I knew that night, and Potin did not come early as usual, and as I had expected him, next morning. It must have been about eleven o'clock when he and Thérèse walked into the garage together,

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with a strange and crestfallen air. One would have thought they had been discharged; but, as there was no one to discharge them, there must be another cause for their discomfiture.

They did not speak, but gazed at me sadly. Potin sighed and shook his head. Thérèse sighed and shook her head. Then they looked at each other, and perhaps they would have said something, had not the English chauffeur at that moment limped into the garage, his forehead plastered.

"Hello!" said he. "Is it true your Prince and Princess have disappeared?"

"How news flies. You have heard already?" exclaimed Thérèse.

"It's true, then?"

"Yes, they've vanished. When I went to Madame's room it was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. I cried out, and the *femme de chambre* came running. We knocked at the door of Monsieur le Prince; no answer. It was unlocked. We ventured in. No one was there; the bed was smooth. All their clothing was hanging up in the wardrobes, nothing disturbed—at least, we saw nothing. Then I ran to tell Monsieur Potin who had just come in to his breakfast, after all night at work. The manager was informed by the hotel servants. We feared that Monsieur and Madame had both been murdered."

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"Sure they had no reason for disappearing? That sort of thing frequently happens at Monte Carlo."

"No such thought was in any one's mind at first, I can tell you," said Thérèse. "But when we discovered that Madame's jewels were all gone, and a little dressing-bag—gold-fitted—also her motoring-coat and hat, which she would certainly not have put on to go to the Casino, after the dinner-party—why, that began to throw a different light on the affair."

"An ugly, red light," sighed Potin. "The manager of the hotel has asked me a great many questions. Some we could not answer, because neither Thérèse nor I knew anything of the Prince and Princess until about three weeks ago. We could only say that we had not had our wages yet, for they were not due; the first month was not up."

"I hope you've picked up some perquisites," said the Englishman.

"As to that, we have perhaps not done badly in small ways," Thérèse acknowledged. "But what can have become of Monsieur le Prince and Madame la Princesse?"

"Perhaps they're really Monsieur and Madame Something Else," said the English chauffeur.

"What a terrible thought!" gasped Thérèse. "But the manager has sent out to the shops to learn if anything was wrong. They have bought a great deal,

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especially Madame. Hats, dresses, jewels, all of the best."

"What's the news?" asked the Englishman curiously.

"None has come back yet. The person is still making his rounds. But I am alarmed. Madame and Monsieur were seen in the hotel just about the time that the Casino closed at night, or a little before. They went up-stairs and came down again in their motoring-coats. It looks very serious. And at all events they are gone. We shall have to sing for our money, Potin and I. Unless there is good news, they will not keep us on at the hotel, and feed us. We must look out for ourselves, and try to find other situations, rather than pay our fare home; but it is difficult, late in the season."

"I suppose so," said the Englishman, indifferent to their anxieties, since he was comfortably placed himself.

"The Australians, Monsieur and Madame Ruggles, will perhaps employ us," suggested Potin. "Madame is not yet suited with a maid; and Monsieur might be persuaded to buy a car and keep me on as chauffeur. I have heard him talk of having a motor of his own."

"What will become of this one?" inquired the other man, jerking his head toward me.

Potin shrugged his shoulders and sighed. "I don't

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know. But the manager says, if anything is wrong, he will keep it, against his bill, which is now immense, as it had not been paid since the end of the first week."

This item of news was particularly interesting to me; and my whole electric system began to thrill with horror at a new thought. What if Paul Fanning had been right, and Barr-Simons had recognized him at the Casino? Would he not suspect that a car in Fanning's possession might be Hugh Cameron's car, as thoroughly transformed in appearance as the thief who had stolen it? Would he not come and examine me, buy me of the defrauded landlord, and go off with me in triumph?

My cylinders seemed twice too heavy as I asked myself these questions; but hours passed on, after Potin and Thérèse had gone gloomily away, and nobody with whom I had any concern came in, except a man whom I took to be the manager of the Prince's hotel. He walked in, looked me over, poked at my wheels with his stick, felt the covering on my seats, and sneered at the crown on my panels. By and by he returned with the proprietor of the garage, and the two eagerly discussed my personal appearance and my value.

The hotel manager—for I now learned without doubt that it was he—cheered up visibly when he learned that as I stood I was worth at least seven or

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eight hundred pounds. He felt safe to get his money back, and so, of course, did the owner of the garage; for all other claims which might be raised, they said, would come after theirs.

That same afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles walked in, followed by Potin, who had evidently made an appointment with them, and who had, meanwhile, replaced my repaired steering-gear and bonnet.

The millionaire and his millionairess were sad. They shook their heads and repeated again and again, "Who ever would have thought it? Such nice, friendly people, too! Well, well, it is a blow!"

The proprietor of the garage was present, too, and interpreted between Potin and Mr. Ruggles, for he could speak some English. Mr. Ruggles had decided to buy a car and to take Potin for his chauffeur. So much was arranged, but Potin was anxious for his new master to have me, and Mr. Ruggles thought well of the plan. It was almost settled, indeed, when Mrs. Ruggles broke in.

"No, I believe I just couldn't stand it!" she exclaimed. "After all the good times we've had in this car with the poor Prince and Princess! I couldn't bear to be reminded of them every minute. It would make me sick. No, I'd rather have a new motor without any associations, so you'll get one if you want me to be happy."

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Poor, fat, red Mr. Ruggles did want her to be happy more than he wanted anything else, so he said that he must look elsewhere to make a purchase. Potin was disappointed; but he had his engagement; after all, the car did not matter. I felt that I was being abandoned when the three turned and left me, without a backward look.

Potin never came again to the garage, nor did the Ruggles. I saw no more familiar faces, save that of the man who owned the place and his employees. The season, which had been unusually long, on account of bad weather in less favored parts of the world, was over—snuffed out. The English chauffeur and his car were gone; the pert *Mercédès* was gone. At last I was alone in the garage, save for a couple of automobiles which belonged to the proprietor, and were let out on hire by him.

Every day, nearly, somebody came in and looked at me, talking over my points: Russians, Germans, Frenchmen, who lingered for the gambling, though the gaieties were over. But these people were of a different class from those who had frequented Monte Carlo earlier in the spring. They had not much money; they wished to do things "on the cheap." They bargained and haggled and—went away. I remained. But one day the manager of the hotel where my "Prince and Princess" had stayed came in, bringing

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with him a tired-looking young man in gray flannels and a Panama hat.

"Where had I seen that interesting, anemic face before?" I wondered. Then I remembered. He was Mr. Boyle-Smith, and he must be rich, or the Prince would not have encouraged him. I listened while he talked to the manager. He had been yachting with friends. They had been to Genoa, to Leghorn, and had run over to Corsica. Now the yacht had brought him back to Monte Carlo. He and his friends were having "a little gamble" before they went home. Quite a surprise to hear that the Prince's car hadn't been sold yet. Had they ever found out who the man and his wife really were? No? Clever of them to get away like that. Pretty little woman. Rather fun to know what they were up to now. He'd lost a little money by them—not much; a bit he'd given "the Prince" for some shares—bogus ones, of course. Oh! well, an experience. For his part he wished the man and woman no harm. Really, he didn't care much about motor-ing. Hated anything mechanical, and didn't think he liked adventures. But—oh, yes—certainly it was a handsome car. He might think of it, perhaps.

Two or three days later he appeared again, tapped me here and there with the air of a proprietor, said he would keep the crowns on the panels to remind him of the Prince, and bought me at the ridiculous, hu-

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miliating price of five hundred guineas. But, as the hotel manager and the owner of the garage said to each other, I was so queer that nobody understood me, and anything was better than to keep me over till next season.

This to be said of Champion, Champion the invincible, Champion the unique! But my greatness was fallen. No one was capable of appreciating me—no one guessed that in possessing me they possessed a treasure beyond their poor calculation. Any wretched, middle-class, forty or sixty horse-power car of known make was easier to sell and had a right to put on airs of superiority over me. This was galling, but, thank my maker, I had enough sense of humor in my metal to be faintly, if bitterly, amused.

Thus I became the property of Mr. Boyle-Smith, not only a parvenu, but a person utterly outside the automobile world. He had decided that it was the correct thing, nowadays, to own a motor-car, and be able to talk about it, because all his smartest friends had cars and the jargon of them on the tips of their tongues. I discerned this state of things in the first conversation which I naturally overheard in the garage, and I knew he was a fool as far as motor knowledge was concerned, from the very way he tapped my body, and peered with would-be knowingness at me, in all the wrong places. Then, when he was in the

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throes of engaging a chauffeur, other secret places of his character were laid bare to me. Not that there was much credit to a brilliant piece of mechanism like me in discovering these secrets, for they were about as intricate as the inner workings of those glassy-looking jelly-fish I have seen sometimes by the sea-shore, when running along a road near a beach.

Mr. William Boyle-Smith enjoyed letting strangers know that he was rich—his father had made the money in ladies' corsets or something of that sort, which even an automobile doesn't mention aloud in mixed society—but he could never have made it for himself in anything; yet, at the same time, he was careful to sound a note of warning that he was a man who knew the value of money, and would never be induced to spend a penny except in securing due value for himself. "Money is money," was a favorite axiom of his, as I soon learned; as if any one ever doubted it!

When he had bought and paid for me, I remained in the garage, until he could engage a chauffeur of superlative skill, combined with superlative cheapness. This *rara avis* was apparently difficult to secure, for every day for a week Mr. William Boyle-Smith used to saunter into the garage once or twice to interview some young man recommended by the proprietor, or by a person outside; now a young man from Nice,

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now a young man from over the Italian border; now a young man left stranded in Monte Carlo itself by an employer who had been unfortunate at the "tables." But always the young man would prove either incompetent, or else too expensive, for Mr. Boyle-Smith had irrevocably made up his mind at the fag-end of the season no chauffeur ought to ask more than fifty francs a week and "find himself." He wanted to be able to impress his friends with his sharpness in screwing a first-rate mechanic down to this price.

At last he was more successful than he deserved to be; but I chuckled a little, maliciously, under my petrol, when I saw the youth of whose prowess he boasted to the owner of the garage. Franz Krumm was the creature's name, and he confessed in my presence, apparently without shame, to having been born in a small place called Emmerich, which would, I believe, scarcely appear on a map, if it were not a frontier town. Now, my own experience, and that of other motors with whom I had made acquaintance, assured me that frontier towns and people unfortunately born in frontier towns, are never of the slightest interest or importance in themselves.

Could any German be expected to drive a car so foreign to his order of intelligence as I was and am? Franz Krumm had all the stolidness of a German without any of the German intellectuality or splendid

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obstinacy which I have observed in finer specimens of that nation. Practically, he had no features. Certain lumps and depressions gave a vague effect of a face, as if some childish hands had modeled his head in dough and baked it. He was addicted to saying "Soh!" and his principal attraction to Mr. Boyle-Smith lay in the fact that he could speak a little English—a language that he had more probably learned as a waiter than as a chauffeur. Also, he was willing to accept the fifty francs; and his new employer might even have beaten him down to less, perhaps, if it had occurred to him to try.

Franz had driven a Benz, and the Benz had been burnt up in a garage at Nice, since when Franz had, I imagine, fared badly, his own name—if one may make an execrable pun—being almost the only crumb he had had to subsist upon. He thought he could drive me; and, under the eye of Boyle-Smith, made a sweating and tremulous examination of my parts.

It was really a desecration that such as he should touch me, but soft and kindly air has ever filled my cylinders since the days when they were cast; and I was sorry for the unfortunate creature, who might starve if he failed to obtain this engagement. I made myself as little obscure as I could, and, owing to my leniency, he did seem to arrive at some vague, far-off understanding of my mechanism.

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That afternoon he took me out, and it is needless to say that the anemic Boyle-Smith did not risk his precious life in the experiment. He stood, trying to look brave and debonair, watching Krumm steer me out of the garage, and jumped aside once with a whistle, as I tried to run over his pointed, russet leather toe.

Owing to my forbearance and good nature, poor Krumm did not disgrace himself, or injure me. I was half-tempted to let him come to grief two or three times, when he was particularly stupid, but the kind airs in my cylinders forbade. Besides, I reflected that, if I had to remain shut up all summer in the Monte Carlo garage, not only should I deteriorate, but I should for many months miss all chance of encountering my dear Master. I knew that it was Boyle-Smith's intention to take me to England, and it was in England that I was most likely now to run across my beloved Hugh Cameron.

More weeks than I was able to count had passed since the glorious and terrible day of the race; and, as he was said to have recovered, I thought it probable that he had by this time gone back to the land across the Channel. To be sure, he had no real home, but I believed that he loved the island which had given us both birth, and would wish to return there as soon as he was able. Some day I might see him again, and

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though it would only be by a miracle that he could recognize me, changed as I was, still, the one thing I had left to hope for in life was that miracle.

I behaved myself like a lamb in the hands of poor Krumm, and he was, accordingly, engaged as my chauffeur. On a blazing day of June, when nobody was left in Monte Carlo except a few Russians, Germans, and declassés cosmopolitans, we bumbled out of the garage, of which I was now sick to death.

I carried only Boyle-Smith and Krumm, for my latest owner was far too stingy to invite a guest whom he would have had to entertain during the journey at his expense. I had a little luggage, too, of course; but my whole load was so light I might have thought there was no more than a fly sitting on my bonnet.

My front glass had been replaced now, but it was far too hot to keep it down; and, amid clouds of white dust, I ran back along the white roads over which the Prince and Princess had brought me long ago. When I say "ran," however, I speak but figuratively. In spite of the kindest intentions, I could not *run* for Krumm. He did not know how to change my speeds properly; he had taken no pains to study my little ways and whims; he had bought the cheapest oil and petrol, and in spite of my light load I often gasped for breath, or coughed to get rid of a grit in my carbureter.

Instead of spinning swiftly and smoothly on, cover-

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ing long distances each day, we were obliged to stop frequently, making short journeys. Often, because I had not been cleaned decently, I had to slow down, and sometimes we were *en panne* for hours, Krumm's ignorance being entirely to blame, or his master's meanness, while I got the credit of all discomforts and disasters.

Finally, my new owner grew to hate me as heartily as I despised him, and I heard him tell Krumm that if this was automobiling, the less he had of it in the future, the better he would be pleased. As soon as he got me to England, said he, he would sell me for any price he could get—perhaps put me up at auction.

But men propose, and—sometimes—motors dispose. The day after we landed—at Southampton, as it happened—things went beyond even my endurance. I lost my temper, owing to a piece of stupidity on Krumm's part, he having forgotten to screw up any of my nuts before starting, and a few miles out of the town my steering-gear went wrong. I butted into a wall—luckily for the pair of incompetents aboard, I was crawling at the time—bruised my bonnet, dislocated my steering-post, and tossed the two men into a ditch.

CHAPTER XIX.

I Fall Upon Evil Days.

I was so out of patience with Boyle-Smith and his Krumm that I almost enjoyed the hard bump; for if I had suffered, they suffered as much and even more.

Two more disheveled, wretched-looking individuals than they, as presently they scrambled, grumbling and groaning, out of the mud, cannot be imagined. There was a little water at the bottom of the ditch into which I had skilfully tossed them; water coated with green slime, of which they had involuntarily accepted generous samples. Their clothes were torn, and in a shocking state; and though they ought to have been thanking their lucky stars for the preservation of their necks, they indulged, instead, in futile maledictions. Boyle-Smith scolded Krumm, and Krumm blamed me. He defended himself by saying that I was a beastly car, that no one but a saint could drive me, and that I had caused him more anguish in ten days than he had known before in the whole course of his life.

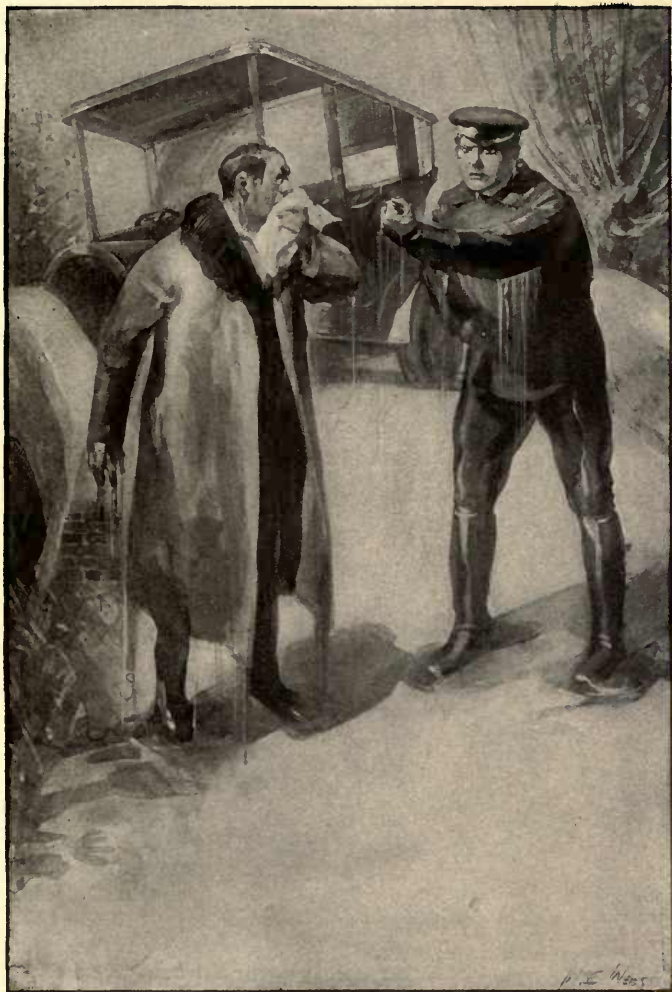
"All right, you can go, then, and find a better car," yapped Boyle-Smith, wiping red blood and green vegetation from his nose and mouth. He added a few

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other remarks, not only uncomplimentary to his chauffeur, but to the chauffeur's country people in general, and his relations in particular.

Even a Krumm will turn, it would seem; and certain of Boyle-Smith's adjectives, applied to Germany as a nation, were the two or three straws too much for him to bear. He was poor, he was an alien in a strange land, but he happened to be a patriot; and for the first time I surprised myself by almost admiring Krumm as he stood up to his purse-proud little employer. He took Boyle-Smith at his word, which the anemic youth was far from expecting at the moment; also he took the opportunity of avenging old iniquities by telling his master exactly what he thought of him. When he had finished, he grabbed his humble hand-bag from under my front seat—his sole possession—and, without even demanding such wages as were due to him—I happened to know he had been paid for a week the day before yesterday—he marched stolidly off back toward Southampton, leaving a trail of green slime behind him.

The unfortunate Boyle-Smith was—to use a favorite expression of Mr. Ruggles—flabbergasted, and would, I am sure, have burst into tears if several vehicles had not been approaching, to keep up his pride. One of these was a farmer's cart, drawn by a huge, upstanding Shire horse, with great feathery



"HE TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY OF AVENGING OLD INIQUITIES."

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legs, like a giant bantam. The cart was big and new, and was driven by a jolly, red-faced young fellow, who looked excellently satisfied with that state of life to which it had pleased Heaven to call him.

A greater contrast between this man and the pigmy Boyle-Smith could not be imagined, and an expression of good-natured contempt overspread the countryman's countenance when he saw me, *en panne*, by the roadside, with my dilapidated owner feebly gesticulating. He slowed down his fine beast, however, in response to a shout from Boyle-Smith, and listened to the gentleman's tale of woe: the damaged car; the absconding chauffeur; the helpless and suffering condition of the motorist.

"I have some—er—distant sort of relatives who have a place near here—must be quite close, along this road, or just off it, perhaps. Could you tow me there?" inquired my owner.

"If it isn't too far out of my way, sir," answered the countryman. "I'm a bit late as it is, but I'll be sorry to seem disobliging."

"The name of the place is Laylor Hall," said Boyle-Smith, "and, my—er—the ladies who live there are called Brenton."

"The Miss Brentons! Oh, yes, sir, I know them well. They've turned the old hall into a boarding-house these last two years," exclaimed the young

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farmer jovially. "They're neighbors of ours, and get their milk from us, since they've given up cow-keeping. I can give you a tow there as well as not. I've got a bit of rope. Hope it's stout enough for that big car of yours."

"Perhaps I'd better ask how much you'll charge?" weakly inquired Boyle-Smith, who could always afford any luxury for himself, but was constitutionally averse to parting with a penny more than necessary for others.

The red-faced young man's eyes flashed. "You can give what you like, sir, or nothing at all," said he. "I've said I'll tow you, and that stands."

What Boyle-Smith did give—or offer to give—in the end, was half a crown, for a three-mile tow; and when the farmer refused to take it and went off without a penny, I believe that he was pleased.

I had been dragged through a wide, open gateway, and an apparently untenanted porter's lodge, up a winding avenue, through a kind of wilderness which must once have been a beautiful park. After something more than a quarter of a mile of this, I arrived in front of an old, red-brick house with stone facings, and it was there that I was unroped and abandoned by the half-amused, half-indignant farmer.

Mr. Boyle-Smith knocked and rang at a door of faded oak, cracked and hungry looking for want of

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oil. It was some time before he was admitted by a depressed-looking old man, bald-headed, with a face like a withered winter apple, and a dress-suit which could not stand many months more of ironing and brushing.

This person, who was, no doubt, a butler, evidently recognized the newcomer, but did not appear overjoyed to see him. As the door stood open, I caught a plimpse of a large, oak-paneled hall, which must once have been fine, but now it was almost bare of furniture, save one good old cabinet of carved oak, containing china. I saw a dilapidated sofa, a few chairs, literally upon their last legs, and a rug or two, which might have been handsome, but were now faded and threadbare, apparently mended and remended by anxious, careful hands.

These sad secrets of a fallen house sprang at me in a moment; then the door closed on Mr. Boyle-Smith, and I had plenty of time to take further observations.

I had heard my dear Master, in old days, as we flew past fine old places, say to Arnaud: "This is Elizabethan; this is Queen Anne; this is of the Georgian period," and so on. Therefore, as I never forgot anything that he said, I knew that Laylor Hall must have been built in the days of Queen Anne. Judging from appearance, too, both outside and in, as far as I was able to see, it wore the air of not having been re-

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furnished or repaired since. Of course, this thought was doubtless an exaggeration of the true circumstances; but, at least, many years must have passed since anything had been done for the preservation of house or place.

The grass of the lawn which surrounded the hall was high and tangled, and choked with weeds. A vast clump of rhododendrons, in full bloom, had degenerated into a wild growth, such as might be seen in a wood. Here and there a tree in the park, which ringed in this charmingly shaped lawn, was so old that it had fallen into pitiful decay. There was a young growth of bushes and brambles; the roses in a large roserie at the left of the lawn were twisted and turned in a wild thicket of red and pink and cream; the sundial was covered with creepers; some of the windows of the house were half-curtained with a dark drapery of ivy; yet, in spite of the desolation, the poor old place retained traces of great beauty; and the mellowed red brick of the rambling hall, the green of the sloping lawn, and the crimson of the rhododendrons were softened into an exquisite picture under the mirrow-like surface of a miniature lake.

As I stood taking in my surroundings, and wondering how long they were to be mine, a party of young people appeared from somewhere behind the house, with tennis-rackets in their hands. They were very

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common young people, with lumpish features; the two or three unattractive men in knickerbockers and cloth caps, which might have been bought ready made for a few guineas in some such cheap shop as I had often passed in London suburbs. The girls wore imitation Panama hats, cotton blouses, and serge skirts, longer at the back than in the front.

Catching sight of me, they hurried across the weedy lawn, and formed a group to gaze curiously.

"Hello, what's this?" exclaimed one of the young men, who looked like a shop assistant out on a holiday. "Looks as if the old girls had got hold of a bloated millionaire, eh? What a treat if they have!" He was very careful in getting out his "h's," and made the most of them.

"Looks as if there'd been a smash," said another youth, tapping my bonnet airily with his tennis-bat. "My brother-in-law has an intimate friend, a doctor, who owns a motor, so I know something about them."

"Goodness, I hope it won't explode!" giggled the girl who evidently thought herself the beauty of the party.

"Motor-cars don't explode when they're standing still," explained the expert patronizingly.

"Well, I hope not," murmured the pretty girl.

They all drew a little nearer, and the men tried to look knowing as they eyed me.

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"Any man, millionaire or not, might get let in by that advertisement of the old girls'," went on the young man who cherished his h's. "It caught *me*, I can tell you. 'Two ladies, of old county family, willing, for the sake of companionship, to entertain a few paying guests, who will be made to feel as if they were members of a house-party, in a magnificent old Queen Anne mansion, with priceless furniture, historic pictures, and heirlooms.' That was the way it went, wasn't it?"

"It was the very words," chuckled another youth of the same caliber. "And in the *Morning Post*, too. You have the feeling that everything you see in the *Morning Post* must be really *smart*, you know."

"The births and marriages you *can* depend upon," put in the pretty girl's sister; "and the deaths, too, for the matter of that."

"I'll bet our deaths'll go in soon, if they don't give us more to eat," said the first young man.

"Well, it *is* cheap," admitted the pretty girl. "A guinea a week; and *some* of the rooms are eighteen shillings."

"I'm in one of them," sighed a youth who had not spoken yet. "My bed's a hospital-cot. The sheets are made of patches. The only chair I've got came to bits last night."

"Anyhow, there's a lovely view from the windows,

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and it is a grand old place," remarked the pretty girl's sister. "One can say one has been staying with a house-party at Laylor Hall. It *sounds* all right. And we have fun romping in the ballroom, evenings."

"We could have good dancing, if the piano would do anything but squeak," said the pretty girl.

"It's more spinet than piano," chuckled some one.

"Well, I'm sorry for the poor old ladies. It's hard on them, for they *are* ladies, and they do the best they can," went on the pretty girl's sister.

"It's a mighty poor best," grumbled the first young man. "But here we *are*, thanks to that advertisement; and a goodish way from London. I suppose we'll finish out the holiday here, my chum and me. We'll worry through, if you young ladies can."

"We like the *air*," loftily replied the pretty girl. "I must confess I did expect, from the advertisement, to find myself among titled people, knights, or honorables at the least; but never mind. We've no fault to find with the company, except the old tabbies who are shocked because we laugh in the hall after they've gone to bed, about nine. For the Misses Brentons' sake, I wish the house was fuller; but for ours, I'm very well satisfied as it is"; and she gave a glance which, though it included all the young men, might have been appropriated by any one of them.

At this moment the door was thrown open by the

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moth-eaten old butler, and out came two elderly ladies, accompanied by Mr. Boyle-Smith. They were little ladies, and gave the impression of having shrunk a good deal, owing to the wear and tear of life; nevertheless they had a certain dignity, which comes of good blood. They were dressed alike, in old-fashioned black stuff, which might have been turned and turned again; and though they might have been of any age from forty-eight to sixty, their thin, oval faces still kept a curiously original, almost girlish look. Somehow they reminded me of pale roses that had been gathered while they were still in bud, and pressed for many years between the pages of a book. Poor little old ladies! My cylinders warmed to them at first glance; and I thought that Mr. William Boyle-Smith ought to be exceedingly proud of the right to call them "Cousin Bettina" and "Cousin Alicia," instead of seeming half-ashamed of the relationship, before the group of "paying guests."

Once, no doubt, these little faded Misses Brentons, with their fine old home, had been relations of whom such people as Boyle-Smith had sprung from must have been delighted to claim kin with. But now they had come down in the world—as I had!—and the Boyle-Smiths had gone up as far as money could carry them. The Miss Brentons were "poor relations" in these changed days, and young Boyle-Smith was in a

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position to swagger—a chance of which he naturally availed himself.

The paying guests, who called their hostesses “old girls” behind the old ladies’ dignified little backs, were, nevertheless, somewhat in awe of them when face to face, it seemed, for they retired slowly into the background, anxious as I knew they were to learn all details concerning me.

Mr. Boyle-Smith made a great adventure out of the slight accident, alluded to his chauffeur as a “dangerous ruffian,” and intimated that the wretch had had to be driven away before he would accept a dismissal. He went on to mention with apparent inadvertence some of the grand friends with whom he had been spending his time abroad, said he had bought his car of a “great pal,” Prince Vasiliévna, but that he was tired of it now, and wanted one of higher power.

“That is always the way with us motorists,” he continued, delighted to see that he was impressing the ladies. “We always want something bigger and newer; we’re never satisfied. Now, I paid a thousand pounds for this motor”—that was a forty horse-power falsehood!—“but already I’ve got my eye on another. As a matter of fact, I stopped here instead of going back to Southampton after the accident, to offer the car to you as a loan until I make up my mind how to dispose of it.”

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"Dear me, that is very kind of you, I am sure, William," said Miss Brenton the elder, who was Cousin Bettina, "but Alicia and I know nothing about automobiles."

"We might, perhaps, learn," suggested Miss Alicia, who was evidently the more ambitious, as well as the younger, of the two; "that is, if William means to offer us the *use* of the car."

"Oh, yes, of course," said William, his boiled-gooseberry eye betraying his conviction that he was saddling his relations with a white elephant. "Oh, yes, use it as much as you like—if you can find a chauffeur to understand it—or you might like to pick up the art of driving yourself. It's quite easy, and would save expense."

"A nice figure Alicia would make driving that great thing!" cooed Miss Bettina. "A mouse driving a pumpkin coach. It gives me a nightmare even to think of it. But certainly we will keep your car till you wish to send for it, William. Unfortunately for us, our stables are empty in these days. You can hardly expect a garage here, but we will do the best we can to give shelter to your property."

"But think how it would add to the attraction of our advertisement if we could put: 'a motor-car for use of the guests at Laylor Hall!'" pleaded Miss Alicia. "It would bring us so up to date; and you remember,

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sister, those horrid Higginsons who turned round and went home when they saw the pony-chaise at the station."

Miss Bettina reflected, her thin little face falling into anxious lines.

"Isn't a motor *very* expensive to keep, William?" she asked.

"Costs next to nothing," fibbed Boyle-Smith, unable to look me in the lamps; for everything about me shouted the word money. I could not help that. I was not to blame for it; but I knew that it was a fact. I was an expensive luxury, and utterly unsuitable to Laylor Hall in these its evil days.

Nevertheless, it ended in the Miss Brentons agreeing to take me over. Evidently Mr. Boyle-Smith was so disgusted with motoring and motors, that he was determined to rid himself of the incubus. His cousins, poor little old ladies, had been brought up to respect and obey male intelligence, even intelligence of the Boyle-Smith order; and it was not difficult to persuade them that I would prove not only an ornament, but a boon and a blessing to the establishment.

Three or four men who had been working in the fields of a neighboring farm were employed to pull, push, and tug me to the stables, where I was wheeled into a large loose-box, draped with cobwebs. Boyle-Smith said that my injuries were insignificant, and

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that he would send a mechanic from Southampton to "put me straight." This promise he had just enough decency to keep; but he might have known, and probably did know, what the result would be. The man who came out on his bicycle to Laylor Hall looked me over, evidently puzzled by more than one of my features, and announced to the two old ladies who had fluttered out with him to the stables, that to be repaired I must be taken to Southampton.

The sisters searched each other's countenances anxiously. How much would it cost? They inquired.

The mechanic answered that a motor would have to be sent "from his place" to tow me into town; then, there was his time to-day; and the repairs would amount to anything from eight to twelve pounds. The whole business might, at most, run up to thirteen or fourteen guineas.

The little old ladies grew pale, but were restrained by pride and self-respect from giving any audible vent to their emotion. They would think about it, they replied. Such a matter would require some consideration. They were not sure whether they would have enough use for the motor-car to justify their going to such expense. They paid the man for his visit, with as much politeness as if he had been a doctor; and my cylinders ached for them as I saw the thinness of Miss Bettina's pocketbook. It was an ancient

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thing of faded purple leather, and had the air of having been handed down to the sisters by one of their parents. When the mechanic had got what he asked, nothing seemed to be left in it but pennies. It was like Boyle-Smith to take credit to himself for doing a favor, while in reality he thought solely of his own convenience. He was now far away, and his poor but proud relations were not of the sort who would follow him up with appeals for money to get them out of the difficulty in which they had been landed by his selfishness.

From time to time the worried little sisters came together in the loose-box, sniffed at me, sighed over me, and, having discussed ways and means, always reached the same conclusion. Things were not going well enough at Laylor Hall to justify an expenditure of even ten pounds on a motor-car. They had got along without such a thing so far, and must continue to do so for the present.

So the dreary days went on. The cobwebs which draped the walls draped me as well. I grew gray with dust, and my paint began to crack, my machinery to rust. In such a state of misery was I reduced that I would have rejoiced to see the face of Boyle-Smith—that mean little face which more than once I had said to myself I hoped never to behold again. There was a season when I hoped that he might realize my value

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and come and claim me, perhaps bringing with him an expert who would tell him what a treasure he had come near to discarding. If this should happen, I would be put to rights and taken out into the world again—the world where my dear Master lived and—perhaps—thought sometimes of me. That hope died at last, as the summer died; but there was always the chance that, if Boyle-Smith never intended to use me again himself, his economical instincts might prompt him to sell me for a song to some one else. But autumn came and went. My loose-box remained shut up. No more visits of inspection were paid to me by the Misses Brenton. No hand ever touched the locked door of my prison, though it was shaken by cold, wintry winds, and soft white feathers of snow drifted through the open space underneath.

I felt myself growing old. I was finished, I said to myself. I should never see my Master again. There seemed nothing left for me but to rot and rust, and finally fall to pieces with the falling fortunes of Laylor Hall.

A year in the life of an ordinary automobile is equal to ten years in the life of a horse, for the legs of a horse have never yet been superseded by any new inventions which suit him better; whereas, every successful make of motor is being continually improved. I thought sympathetically, now, of the poor old super-

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annuated cars I had sneered at in the pride of my youth and power. Though I was a law unto myself, and so original in my compositions that my Master had called me "day after to-morrow's car," still, by this time, he or some one else had perhaps thought of something even more marvelous than I had seemed at birth.

I lost count of the days, the weeks, the months. I knew only that winter had passed and spring had come, because the cold no longer poured through the crevices round the door. There were balmy airs, and glimpses of sunshine from the happy world which I hardly expected now to see again. Then it grew warm. There were bright, moonlit nights and hot days. Summer had come once more.

I slept as much as I could, by the way of forgetting my hopeless condition, though it is true that dreams made me sadder than before, when I woke again. And one morning when summer seemed to have lasted for many weeks I was waked from a doze by a voice which was like a part of my dream.

In my sleep I had been traveling to Paris, joyously carrying my handsome young Master and lovely Lia Murray. She had been warning him against Arnaud, and I was wishing with all my might that he would heed her words, when I heard her voice outside the door of the loose-box.

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"Is this where you keep your motor-car, Miss Brenton?" the voice was saying. But I could not believe my own valves. I thought that I was not really awake, or else that my imagination was playing me a trick.

"Perhaps I am in my second motorhood," I told myself. But something was going to happen. For the first time in many months the key was being turned in my door, and I would know in a moment whether I had heard the voice of Lia Murray or a stranger.

CHAPTER XX.

I Sing "The March of the Cameron Men."

Creak—creak! sounded the rusty hinges. The door opened, and I could have teuf-teufed a wild song of joy and welcome, if only my poor, rusty engine had been working.

It was she—Lia, and Lia's father; and with them were the two Miss Brentons.

No wonder I had thought I was dreaming. That these two, out of all the people in the wide world, should have come to open my prison doors at Laylor Hall, seemed little short of a miracle. But there are some things, I have learned, that are too strange not to be true.

So wonderful did it seem for Lia to be there, that for an instant I believed that she must have tracked me to this place, that she must know me in my bulky, red disguise, and have come to rescue me from half across the world. But my first look at her face showed me that this wild supposition was a mistake. She was as beautiful as ever, more womanly looking and sedate, somehow, though not a day older in appearance; but not the faintest sign of recognition brightened her eyes as she turned them with interest upon me.

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"Why, yes," she said, evidently continuing some conversation with the Miss Brentons, "it does seem a pity to shut up such a fine big car and not use it. The poor thing is simply thick with dust and cobwebs, and I declare, if there isn't something that 'looks like a mouse-nest in the back seat in the tonneau!"

This explained a curious tickling sensation I had often experienced of late, and had been at a loss to account for. No doubt her surmise was right. I was at the mercy of the meanest creatures, who had the liberty I was denied.

"My sister and I have been somewhat straitened in our finances," answered the elder Miss Brenton, with gentle dignity. "And our cousin, to whom the car belongs, has been on a yachting excursion with friends, going round the world. We haven't heard from him, but I saw in a paper that he had returned the other day, and arrived in London."

Mr. Murray came close to me, and began examining me in a blundering, amateurish way.

"This automobile would want a lot of doing up, beyond the repairs, before it would be fit to use," said he.

Miss Alicia's face fell. "Oh, do you think so?" she sighed. "Dear me, it does seem as if everything was against us. Bettina and I talked things over, after what you said last night, and when your daughter

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thought you and she might like to hire the car by the day the rest of the time you—you are kind enough to stop with us, we fancied that we might be able to undertake the repairs mentioned by a mechanic we once called in. But as you say, now that one comes to see the thing, it *does look* as if a great deal would have to be done; revarnishing, perhaps; and I'm afraid there ought to be recovering for the seats."

"There certainly ought," said Mr. Murray, "and I don't know much about such things; but if you've set your head on seeing what you've got left of England on an automobile before going home, I guess we'd better hire one that's ready."

I almost burst a valve on hearing this, it was such agony to have my hopes raised to the sky only to have them dashed to earth again. It was a good thing for my reputation that I was not working, for without doubt I should have been attacked with failure of the ignition. But Lia did not answer. Her eyes, roving over me, had rested on my wheels.

"Why, Dad!" she exclaimed, brushing past him and bending down to peer more closely, "do you notice anything strange about this automobile?"

"No," said her father, "except that it looks like a back number, gone out of print."

"The wheels are exactly like those on Mr. Cameron's car!" the girl explained excitedly.

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For a second I felt as if my carbureter were on fire, but I cooled down again in thought when Mr. Murray spoke again.

"What Mr. Cameron?" he asked blankly.

Gone like a broken sparking-plug was any hope that the father and daughter were still in touch with my Master, and that, through them, if they would only hire or buy me, I might reach him again, after all. They had lost sight of him; nevertheless, I would rather belong to Lia Murray than any one else in my world, because of old, happy associations. But how could I dare dream that she would accept a poor, old, battered wreck such as I must now appear, covered with dust and cobwebs in this dingy loose-box?

"Oh, Dad, you must remember Mr. Cameron," the girl reproached her father. "Surely you know whom I mean? That splendid young Englishman who took me to Paris in his car, while you followed; and we went to his race to see him win, but he was badly hurt."

"Of course I remember him well enough," Mr. Murray said, "but I'd forgotten his name, and we've met such bushels of people since, and Camerons and Campbells, and all sorts of names in Scotland, I can't pretend to sort them out in my mind, and ticket the right owners. But as for the wheels of his car, I don't know that they were different from any others. I

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only know his car was no more like this than a race-horse is like a hippopotamus."

"No, his car wasn't like this," admitted Lia, "but the wheels are *just* the same. They had ordinary tires, you know. It makes me quite *homesick* to see this automobile."

I guessed then that, though she might not have mentioned my Master or me to her father during all these long months, she had thought of us often, and of the glorious day when we spun her toward Paris, all three happy and full of hope.

Mr. Murray laughed. "If it makes you homesick, we'd better go back to the house," said he.

"No, I want to talk to you here about this car," she objected. "But we needn't keep the Miss Brentons. You see," she went on to the sisters, "I want to persuade my father to buy this automobile!"

"Buy this old ruin!" exclaimed Mr. Murray. "Of all the——"

"It *isn't* a ruin," broke in his daughter. "You just wait till you see it all dusted and varnished, and new leather on the seats. It'll be a beauty, I promise you."

"I suppose our cousin would sell," replied Miss Alicia. "I think he is tired of motoring, and he seemed to have taken a dislike to this car."

"We won't buy it, anyhow, unless he pays you a commission on the price we give, because that's only

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fair, and you've kept it for him a long time; you can say, if we decide to take it off his hands, it must be arranged that way," said Lia, as shrewdly as if instinct had shown her a chart of Mr. Boyle-Smith's character.

"I don't think we'll buy it on any terms," Mr. Murray put in stolidly. "I'd have been willing to hire the automobile for you, if it had pleased me when I came to see it, but——"

"Well, we'll just talk it over, anyway, Dad; and maybe the Miss Brentons will let us stay here, where we can look at the car," cut in Lia, in her pretty, coaxing voice. By this time, my petrol would have been rising with hope if I had not been empty these many weary months. I had not had a very long acquaintance with Mr. Murray and Miss Cecilia; but the knowledge I had of them made me almost sure that, if she had really made up her mind she wanted me, she would get me in the end.

The two Miss Brentons gladly took the hint conveyed in the girl's words; and, saying they would go and have a look at the new boy who was doing the garden, they pottered away. The moment their backs were turned Lia helped herself to a large silk handkerchief which was hanging out of her father's pocket, and dusted off my front seat—*not* the seat with the alleged mouse-nest.

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"Now let's sit here and pretend we're having a spin," laughed the girl, climbing up. "I'll drive!" and she laid her little warm hand on my battered steering-wheel. "Poor old car! It has gone through the wars! But it can easily be made as smart as new. I wish it could tell us its story, don't you?"

How I did echo that wish, and how surprised she would have been, could it have been granted!

"This seems like old times, doesn't it, dear?" she asked when her father—grumbling a little—had humored her by scrambling to the place by her side.

"Anybody'd think you'd spent half your life in an automobile to hear you talk, Lia," said Mr. Murray. "Except that day going to Paris, you haven't set foot in one half a dozen times since."

"Oh, but that day was the day of my life," she cried. "I shall never forget it—or Mr. Cameron."

"I don't recall hearing you mention his name since the day we learned that he was out of danger from his injuries," said her father.

"Well, we left France and went to Italy that very day. There were lots of other people and things to talk about," she answered, a little confused.

"I remember being a bit worked up because you wouldn't stir till you heard he was all right," went on the old gentleman. "But afterward, when you seemed to forget him, why, my mind was relieved,

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and I forgot him, too. Not that he wasn't a very nice young man."

"He was," said Lia softly. "You know, he's a great swell now."

"No, I don't," replied Mr. Murray blankly; "I don't know anything about him, except that he got well after lying in the hospital for a good many weeks, and probably went home to England with that pretty sister of his."

"She's married now," said Lia.

"How do you know?" inquired her father.

"I saw all about it in the papers. I didn't speak of it to you, because—because—I thought if you were interested you'd be sure to see it, and—say something."

"Great Scott! We've got more to do than read about weddings, especially English weddings!"

"But Mr. Cameron's sister married an American, Mr. Vandervoort, the famous Mr. Vandervoort who started the great daily paper in London and Paris—the one who gave the cup for the automobile race, where poor Mr. Cameron and his car came to grief. It was a grand wedding."

"Oh, that was it, was it? Well, perhaps I saw the account of the function, but didn't associate the bride's name with any one we knew. When did it happen?"

"Long ago. While we were in Italy. And not long after Mr. Cameron's father died. He was a clergy-

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man, but, all the same, I don't think he could have been a very nice, kind man, for he was angry with his son for years because he wouldn't enter the church. As if one could, without a vocation. You didn't know his father was a lord, did you?"

"Not I. What kind of a lord?"

"A viscount. That's why Mr. Cameron was the Honorable Hugh Cameron. But now he's Lord Dunayrtoun; and there are often things about him in the papers. He hadn't so very much money, it seemed, even though he did come into his father's title; but Mr. Vandevorst and he went in together for making the same kind of automobile that Mr. Cameron invented and ran in the race. There were people who tried to steal the secret, but they didn't get it; and Mr. Vandervorst was now fully interested in the car that was broken. They've got works now, where their automobiles are made, and already they've delivered a few to customers, though it's only a year since they began, and they're making a great success. They're hurrying up with one of a hundred and twenty horsepower, or something gigantic like that; bigger, even, than the dear old car that died."

The emotions of the "dear old car that died," during this recitation, are not to be described. It was better than a precious draft of life-restoring petrol to hear that my beloved Master had come into his own,

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and was now rich and brilliantly successful—glorious to think of the bitter mortification his good fortune must have inflicted on our common enemy, Barr-Simons. But I was only an automobile; not a winged aeroplane of angelic disposition, and my very metal seemed to disintegrate as I heard how I had been superseded.

Hugh had no longer any reason to regret me, since his sister's marriage had given him a powerful friend and millionaire partner to forward all his schemes. He had made other cars like me—on an improved pattern, perhaps; and one, one above all others, grander than I had ever been, a car which would win for him the world-fame which I had tried and failed to win.

"I hope the wheels of this poor old wreck aren't falling to bits," grumbled Mr. Murray. "It seems as if the thing was shaking under us."

"You imagine it, dear," said Lia. "I think it's a beautifully comfortable car, as strong as a rock, and I should just love to have it to finish our tour around England. If I had an automobile of my own, I believe I could go home happy, though I do feel as if I should have to come back to dear England once every year now I've seen it."

"We're seeing this part of it in a mighty queer way," chuckled Mr. Murray grimly. "Castle Rackrent isn't in it with Laylor Hall."

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"It's an adventure, anyhow," said Lia. "I'm so sorry for those poor old ladies, that I'm just as glad we answered their wonderful advertisement, which seemed as if it would mean getting into the very inner heart of aristocratic England."

"All the same, it's a real take-in," answered her father.

"Well, this is a fine old place, and they have got priceless furniture and china and pictures—the two or three good things they have left."

"And all the rest can hardly be held together with glue," laughed Mr. Murray. "I wonder any of the 'paying guests' stay over more than one meal."

"It's going to be all different for next season," said Lia calmly. "Miss Brenton thinks the five thousand dollars I've offered to lend her will mend the old things and buy enough new ones—to say nothing of pretty chintzes and clean rugs to make the advertisement quite true—and poor old Laylor Hall really popular. Now, don't open your eyes at me like that, Dad! You promised you'd never question what I wanted to do with my own money."

"I'll be jizzled!" murmured Mr. Murray indignantly. I did not know exactly what he meant; but his daughter did not appear to be either shocked or alarmed, so perhaps it was nothing very bad.

Of course, it did end as I thought it would, in Mr.

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Murray's buying me. He haggled in telegrams with Boyle-Smith, who had just come back from London from that long trip at some one else's expense; and at last, when it had occurred to the shrewd old American to break off negotiations, came a wire from the owner offering me for two hundred and fifty pounds, of which the Miss Brentons were to have fifty.

The same mechanic who had inspected me a year ago came again, and towed me off to Southampton behind a puffy little apoplectic motor of eighteen or twenty horse-power, who would not have dared call its engine its own in my presence a year and three or four months ago.

I was taken to a combination of machine-shop and garage at Southampton, and the first face I saw there was that of Franz Krumm, who had evidently sought employment and found it in this establishment, after leaving Boyle-Smith *planté la*, in the road.

Judging from the expression of his lumpish face, he had not gained much in intelligence through added experience, but his dull, blue eyes lit up with such a gleam of genuine pleasure at sight of me, that I could not help being a little glad to see him, in spite of past injuries. He had not liked me any better than I had liked him, and had not even paid me the compliment of trying to understand me, while I had read him through and through at first glance.

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But petrol is thicker than water when you have poured it yourself, I suppose, as well as when you have received it. The fact that I was a link with his past, apparently warmed the heart of Krumm toward me—and I felt much the same toward him. He hovered about me a great deal during the repairing and refreshing process, and as I grew handsome and distinguished once more, under the hands of the upholsterer and varnisher, he became proud of his old association with me.

In informing the management that he had driven me for a former owner, he naturally neglected to add the information that my battered condition was due to him. He said, and even demonstrated, that he understood me thoroughly, which no one else did; and when Mr. Murray and Lia came into the garage to see how I looked—they were both astounded by my renewed magnificence, and Lia said, "I told you so!"—he begged to be engaged as their chauffeur.

With them he had to be more frank than he had been with his employer, but he said that he had been half-starved by Mr. Boyle-Smith, who grudged me decent oil and petrol. It pleased Lia that he could explain the mystery of the crown upon my glittering panels—a real live Prince and Princess had owned me, then!—and when Krumm hinted that not only was he the one man in England who knew me as I

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should be known, but that he had an aged mother and five sisters in Germany depending upon his exertions, Lia induced her father to engage him at once.

By this time, the Murrays had been staying for a fortnight at Laylor Hall, and were evidently, in spite of their compassion for the Brentons, glad to get away.

We started forth the day after my varnish was pronounced dry; and though Krumm was as stupid and dreamy as ever, his wages were now so good that he did indulge me with oil free from grit. Thankful for this boon, and rejoicing beyond power of petrol to express in my cleanliness, my freedom from rust as well as dust, my blessed liberty, and the sheer delight of motion after long inaction, I found myself able to run surprisingly well for my bungling chauffeur.

As for Lia, she was in the seventh heaven as the proud possessor of an automobile of her own, and such a fine one. Even her father confessed that I was a wonderful bargain at the price; and the two discussed taking me over to America with them when they went "home."

Their talk of leaving England, however, was like annihilation to me, for each day now, I hoped against hope that we might run across my dear Master. Though he would not recognize me; though he had other favorites now, I thought I could rust out con-

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tentedly in the end, if I could but see him just once more before I was transported from English shores for ever.

The father and daughter had already lingered, however, much longer than they had originally intended. They had "done" Ireland and Scotland, as ordinary tourists, traveling by train, and would have finished their visit to England in the same dull way, had they not been seduced by the Miss Brentons' advertisement, and thus chanced upon me.

Weather favored us, for it was late in the month of July; and day after day we ran about, through the middle counties of England, then south to Devon and Cornwall.

Never, for an instant, did I relax my vigilance, staring ahead, flashing glances down side roads, even when dust was so thick that my lamps were blurred, or rain fell so heavily that they flickered under a bulletlike hail of drops. Always I was searching for my Master; always I made my engine work to the air of that "March of the Cameron Men," which, whistled by Hugh, had been one of the first sounds I had ever heard. "If he should pass, and catch the thrum of it, he might pause and suspect the truth," I would assure myself at night, lying in some new garage.

"Will ye no come back again?" my motor would ask, in the beautiful old tune I had learned from his

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lips; yet he did not come; and in a fortnight more I was to be shipped to New York.

One hot, dusty day, however, I was so dispirited that I had not energy to beat out the "March of the Cameron Men." The fact was, I was going on very little petrol, but Krumm intended to get me through to the village where we would put up for the night, without stopping to buy more. I could do it, I knew, but I was thirsty and cross, and felt very slack. Almost I could have gone to sleep as I ran, and indeed, I was half-dreaming of a nice, cool garage, like the one where my Master had kept me in Paris on the way to the race—my good dreams were always of the old days—when out from the cloud of white dust far ahead, down the straight, level road, I saw emerge—myself!

Yes, it was true, and no waking dream. Myself as I once had been, was coming to meet—myself, as I was now—coming faster, faster, and near. Soon we should have passed one another as ships pass in the dark, and all would be over.

It was only for half a second that I was dazed, not knowing what to make of the vision. Then, in an electric flash, I realized the truth. One of my Master's cars was approaching—the grand champion—making a trial trip, perhaps—and who was likely to be at the helm if not my Master himself?

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Two men were in the car, both masked and goggled. He who was driving slowed down a little as in duty bound, at signs of a car ahead; still, his speed was great; there was but a second to think.

It was my Master. I knew him, in spite of his mask and the cap pulled low over the forehead. I knew him afar off, and would have known him, I think, had it been darkest midnight instead of blinding noon.

He would go on, and not know me. This chance—for which I had longed and lived since the day we lost each other—might never come again. What should I do?

With a violent effort I gulped away the last drop of my petrol which might, with economy, have lasted another half-hour. Sighing, I stopped dead, in the middle of the road, just as Krumm was in the act of turning out for the big racing-car.

Quickly, my Master put on his brakes, or he would have run me down—for I had taken that risk, even with the thought of Lia in my cylinders; I knew so well what Hugh could do in an emergency.

She had not seen him yet, nor he her. She wore a kind of hood of gray silk, which covered her face as well as her head, and had a talc window over the eyes. This made her unrecognizable, and as we were leaving some very fine scenery behind, she and her father had lately changed over to sit with their backs to the

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motor, so that they might have the last glimpse of the sea and the downs.

My sudden stop, however, and the whiz of an approaching car of high power, caused father and daughter to turn hastily round; and, though Mr. Murray cared too little for automobiles to know one sort from another, Lia instantly recognized the new car as the image of my old self.

My Master, chivalrous as always, had stopped dead, believing me to be *en panne*, and wishing to ask if assistance were needed. He already had his cap off and his lips apart for the question, when Lia exclaimed: "Why, it's Champion over again!"

With that, off came my Master's mask, and my cylinders almost cracked in the wild, mad ecstasy of seeing him again.

"Is that Miss Murray's voice?" he asked, and Lia began to untie the ribbons of her silk hood, while Mr. Murray pulled his goggles solemnly down over his nose, to peer over them.

"Mr. Cameron!" the girl and her father both exclaimed; but instantly Lia remembered all those bits of information she had picked up from the papers, and amended: "I mean, Lord Dunayrtoun."

Now, my Master had jumped down from his place in the magnificent new racer, which I had to admit was a flattered likeness of my old self, and without taking

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the slightest notice of me, was shaking hands with Lia and Mr. Murray.

"If you only knew how glad I am to find you again!" he exclaimed heartily, his voice, which I had loved, nicer than ever. "I've searched everywhere, inquired of every one, tried every way I could think of to get at you, even—even one way of which I'm rather ashamed. But I was driven to it by desperation: I put a 'personal' in my brother-in-law's paper, English and Continental editions, which nearly everybody seems to see."

"We contrived to miss it," said Lia, whose cheeks were very pink. "Do tell us what it said."

"Oh—nothing much. Only I begged that Mr. Murray—I put initials, of course, not names, and hinted at the circumstances—that Mr. Murray could let me know where you were. I felt we were friends, you know, and I couldn't bear to lose you."

"We waited, quite near, until you were out of danger. Then we went away; for you had your sister and other friends, and we didn't know you long enough to intrude," explained Lia. "We were awfully grieved about—about the race, and everything. I was sure always it was treachery. I was *so* glad when I saw in the papers that you and Mr. Vandervoorst were making more of the same kind of cars, and succeeding so splendidly."

Champion

"You knew all about me, and never wrote?"

"I—we—thought you'd have forgotten," stammered Lia shyly.

He looked at her without answering. And she must have seen what I saw—that he loved her and had been longing for her, since she had been lost. But this time she grew pale, instead of pink. I felt the trembling of her slim body, and the tightening of her little fingers as they nervously grasped the back of the seat. Then, she hurried to speak again, and change the subject. "I don't know what has happened to us!" she laughed. "It's just as if our car had stopped on purpose to say 'how do you do' to you."

(Little did she guess how near she was to the truth!)

For the first time my Master glanced at me with observant eyes.

"We stopped—my chauffeur and I"—he exclaimed, "to ask if we could do anything, thinking we were offering aid to strangers. What luck—what *wonderful* luck! that it should be you and Mr. Murray. So you are regular motorists now."

"My daughter would buy this automobile second-hand; and it does seem as if we hadn't made a bad bargain," answered Mr. Murray. "We had it for about a month, and this is the first time I've known it to go wrong."

Champion

"I took a fancy to the car, because the wheels are like your first, dear old Champion, after which I hear you've named all the others. By the way, what became of it? I suppose, broken as it was, you kept it, and value it still?"

My Master's handsome face changed and darkened. I listened with all my valves for what he would say next. The whole worth of life depended on his words about me.

"Value it?" he echoed. "I have only a memory to value, but that's more to me than any real car we've ever made or shall make. Champion fell into an enemy's hands, Miss Murray, and was burnt in his garage, whether through malice or not, who knows? One can only suspect. But I regret that first love of mine as if, in losing it, I'd lost my right hand. And I believe I'd have given my right hand to keep that car. It was like finding I had lost part of myself when I woke up to consciousness and learned that Champion had been destroyed."

"I—didn't know it had been burned," said Lia, her voice a little unsteady, in her sympathy with Hugh. "I hoped you had got the car again."

"No. And nothing can ever make up to me for its loss," my Master answered. "Unless—one thing."

"What thing?" questioned Lia.

"A thing I don't suppose I dare hope for."

Champion

"Winning another race?"

"No. Not a *race*. Perhaps I'll tell you some time—if you're really interested. For now that I've found you I don't mean to let you go—you and Mr. Murray, of course."

Lia laughed a sweet little, nervous laugh. "Well," she said, for the sake of saying something quickly, "I don't see any signs just at present that we shall ever go *anywhere*."

"That reminds me that I must help your chauffeur," exclaimed Hugh. "He doesn't seem to have found out yet what's the matter." And he glanced at Krumm, who was looking at me stupidly under the bonnet.

So absorbed had he been in the girl, that so far Hugh's eyes had not traveled much farther than the crowns on my panels, but now they suddenly fell upon the wheels of which Lia had spoken. Startled, he bent down and stared at them. When he rose, though he said nothing, his eyes were dilated, and there was an odd, tight look about his lips.

"Will you let me have a glance at the motor?" he asked quietly of Krumm.

The chauffeur stood aside; and once more my metal thrilled under the touch of the hands I had loved and lost—the hands that had fashioned me.

Hugh's eyes saw me, and in an instant were convinced. In spite of himself, he uttered a faint cry.

Champion

"What is it?" asked Lia quickly.

"Nothing much," he said, in a choked voice. How could he claim me now when I was *her* car, bought with her father's money. But he knew me, I was sure of that now—knew me for his own. And I was no longer jealous of the new Champions, not even the giant racer, for—even if I were not to belong to him again—had he not said no other car could be to him what I was?

"Is the motor badly injured?" Lia went on.

"No, not at all," he replied almost mechanically.

She jumped down from the tonneau, where she had been sitting, and came to his side.

"You're looking at that queer little Greek word on the motor!" she cried. "I've often noticed it. I call it the car's *birthmark*."

"So it is," said Hugh.

"You must tell me what it is. Why, you—you—recognize it. Oh, I must know, now. Can it be——"

"It's Champion," Hugh told her, the answer dragged from him. "I knew the motor instantly, of course, and that's his name in Greek, which I scratched there the day before the motor was mounted on the chassis. My blessed old Champion, he wasn't burnt up, after all, in that beast's garage. Some one must have transformed him, for who knows what purpose, but here he is."

C h a m p i o n

"It's Fate," exclaimed Lia. "Fate took us to the right place to find him, and made us buy him—to give him back to you again. For, of course, we'll do that, won't we, Dad?"

"Of course," said Mr. Murray.

"Of course not; he's yours now, and I'm delighted that he should be yours," Hugh protested, his hand laid lovingly on my birthmark.

* * * * *

But that evening, after dusk, in the deserted make-shift garage of the village inn, where they all put up for the night—because naturally Hugh turned round, and went with the Murrays—he and Lia sat together on my front seat, while the moon came up over the trees and peered at them and me. He told her what it was he wanted to win, and she told him that it was already won. So there was no longer any question as to which should be my owner. I belonged to them both, and when they had decided their own future they decided mine. I was to be remade in my old form, and be again the Champion I had been.

"I've made nothing to touch him," said my Master again, "and he and I will win a race together yet."

THE END.

WHAT THE REVIEWERS SAID

About the Novel

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Novelized from Charles Klein's great play

By ARTHUR HORNBLow

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